This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

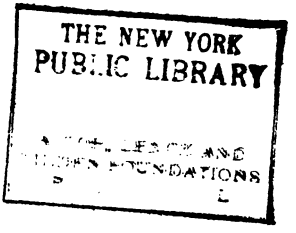
NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07602533 1

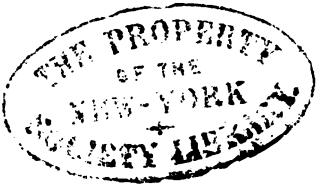
TOUCHSTONE OF LIFE

NBC

MacMahon

la
.44


THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
FOUNDATIONS


THE PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW-YORK

"THE MODELS REPRESENTED THE BUSTS OF TWO MEN."—*Page 100.*

The Touchstone of Life

By ELLA MacMAHON

ILLUSTRATED

New York
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS
1897

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
1161751B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 191 L

COPYRIGHT, 1897, BY
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
All rights reserved

F

THE TOUCHSTONE OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE train from Cambridge ran into Liverpool Street Station, and a young man jumped out on the platform from a first-class carriage.

Seventeen years ago—for what happened on this especial day took place seventeen years ago—a young man, who was an undergraduate of the university of Cambridge, whose college was Trinity and whose annual allowance of money was sufficient to place him in a good set, travelled first class, as much as a matter of course as in these days Heads of Houses and other superb personages have been known to travel third.

It was the first week in July, and the young man in question—who, by the way, was no longer an undergraduate, since he had obtained a second class in the historical tripos-lists a few weeks before—had travelled up from Cambridge without encountering any person of his acquaintance, an incident which did not greatly trouble him, as his thoughts were quite sufficient to keep him busy and invest his solitude with an interest that would have rendered the society of a companion rather undesirable than otherwise.

Sc 52

It was his twenty-second birthday, and it was, he knew, destined to mark the beginning of a fresh epoch in his life, although the precise nature of the reasons why his life should enter upon it were not known to him yet. Nevertheless, he knew that the ensuing hours would explain much.

He ran down into Bishopsgate Street and hailing a hansom, gave the driver an address in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The rapidity and directness with which he made his way through the crowds that filled the great terminus, as well as a certain assurance of manner and bearing, were noticeable and markedly characteristic in so young a man. As he stood for a moment on the pavement, awaiting the hansom that crossed the street in answer to his summons, he looked a very favourable specimen of the Englishman which the public schools and the universities turn out by the hundred every year. Well built, well dressed, and pre-eminently clean looking, even for a class so proverbially clean as that to which he belonged, there was about Ivor Clay already, a touch of that distinction which differentiates one man literally from among thousands of his fellows—a touch in truth of that quality which leads the observer of character to unhesitatingly predict that its possessor may one day do great things; will at the very least, wherever his walk in life should happen to be, lift himself out of the ruck of those who share with him the same calling, or enjoy similar advantages. Apart from this, Ivor Clay looked what he was—a young English gentleman who up to the present had been content to take life very much as he found it, and who had found it "fairly jolly," all things considered.

He stretched himself comfortably in a corner of the hansom, with the result that the back cushions of the latter tipped his straw hat a good deal over his eyes.

It was very early in the day, and he was only in town for a few hours, so that his dress was not so rigidly conformed to the standard which town re-

quires of a gentleman as might have been expected —especially seventeen years ago, when a straw hat in Piccadilly even in July and in the morning was sufficient to confer upon the wearer the sign manual of eccentricity. All the same, Ivor Clay's blue serge suit and straw hat failed to disturb the accurate conventionality to which the man's whole appearance conformed: a conventionality the more agreeable in that there was nothing wooden about it.

Arrived at Lincoln's Inn Fields, the cab drew up before a hall door bearing a large brass plate that proclaimed to all whom it might concern that "Messrs. Tilson, Staters, and Claim, Solicitors," dwelt within. It was evident that Ivor Clay was expected, for an elderly shabby clerk immediately passed Mr. Clay on to the care of a young and dapper clerk, who in his turn handed the visitor over to the tender mercies of a young gentleman whose bearing clearly marked him as "articled," and who finally ushered the new-comer into the presence of Mr. Tilson, the senior partner and most active member of the firm.

Mr. Tilson's greeting differed in some respects from what under the circumstances would have been generally presented. He stood up, and stretching out one hand drew his visitor close beside him, while he laid the other hand on the younger man's shoulder and uttered a few words of warm affection. The younger man's demeanour in response to this was, too, more that of a son to a father than of a client to his lawyer. Nevertheless, Mr. Tilson was not Ivor Clay's father; he was simply Ivor Clay's man of business. But he was also his guardian and trustee.

"Sit down," he said, pushing the young man into a leather arm-chair, while he stood for a second beside him, "and let me offer you a glass of sherry and a biscuit, or a sherry and seltzer—eh?"

The young man declared without hesitation for

a sherry and biscuit. He knew Mr. Tilson's brown sherry far too well to desecrate it with seltzer-water, and said so, pleasantly. The elder man smiled. Even the articled clerks knew that the way to "bamboozle the 'boss'" was to allude judiciously to the merits of the Tilson cellar.

Mr. Tilson rang for glasses and seated himself deliberately in his swivel chair before his writing table, from whence he bestowed more than one glance of affectionate approval at the strong young form that filled up the leather arm-chair facing him.

Ivor Clay had taken off the straw hat and had flung it carelessly on the lid of a tin box that stood next the wall close to his hand. Evidently Ivor Clay was very much at home here. Mr. Tilson's eyes glanced from the straw hat with the gay college ribbon, where it lay on the lid of the big tin box, and then back again to the face of the owner of the hat. The face was a healthy one, pleasantly sun-burnt as that of a young English gentleman is bound to be, and indicative even at first sight of good temper and a disposition in which generosity was not wanting. That, however, which gained for it a second glance from thoughtful or observant persons, was its indication of nascent strength and power unusually developed in a man of his age. Broad across the brow, and almost equally so at the base, contour and expression alike betrayed these. It was not highly intellectual, although it was extremely intelligent. It was the face of the man of action, to whom deeds rather than ideas are the moving force of things. The features were not remarkable in any way, with the exception of the mouth, and this merely because in the moulding of the latter there was a slight contradiction to the prevailing type in the remainder of the face. It was at once harder and kindlier than might have been expected. But its owner was still a very young man, too young to predicate with any degree of certainty the possible qualities it might cover.

Deprived of his hat, his head showed that it was of the square-shaped type, wide over the ears and full at the back; essentially, like the face, the head of the man of action. The hair, which was very fair, quite flaxen in hue, covered the skull well, while it had a tendency to fall over the forehead in a manner that displeased the owner of it, who brushed it with a diligence that kept it smooth and neat, although it failed to conquer the peculiarity in question. At this particular moment, the removal of his hat had sent one thick strand down over Ivor Clay's right eyebrow. Almost all through the subsequent conversation Ivor Clay's right hand was trying to smooth that particular lock back again to its proper place.

Mr. Tilson looked at his visitor with the air of one who had scarcely decided even yet how he was going to begin what he had to say. In the end he began with a remark which was quite superfluous, and hardly pertinent to the subject that was to follow.

"So you have got your degree?" he said, slowly.

"Yes," said Ivor Clay.

"I congratulate you."

The younger man's face clouded slightly.

"Only a second class, dash it!" he observed; "and by a regular squeak, confound it!" He raised himself in his chair, as his right hand pushed up that troublesome hair with a sort of firm impatience. "It's odd, isn't it? I *just* missed a first class, and I *just* missed my Blue."

"Eh?—I beg your pardon, your ah——?"

Mr. Tilson was not a university man.

"My Blue," repeated the younger man, with a smile, "my place in the Eight, the 'Varsity boat race you know."

"Oh, ah yes, to be sure," said Mr. Tilson, who didn't know very much about it.

"Yes," pursued the other; "but"—he smiled—"*that* is not beyond recall. You see my stroke was all right; it was only a question of weight, and

that can and must be remedied, so if I stay up another year and train I'm pretty certain to be all right."

"Ah yes, to be sure," Mr. Tilson interposed, promptly. "With regard to staying up, as you call it, that is what I want to talk to you about; at least"—he corrected himself with an exactitude in keeping with the neat rows of documents tied and ticketed on the table before him—"that is *one* of the subjects of which I wish to speak this morning—your project of remaining at Cambridge for another year in order to study Law. May I ask if you still adhere to that?"

"What? stay up and read Law? Well, yes; I suppose so."

"Then you still think of the Bar as your future profession?"

"I suppose so," said the younger man again.

A pale faint smile crossed Mr. Tilson's iron grey face.

"It's as good as there is," continued his companion, lazily; "at least it will lead me to what I want." It was noticeable that in the latter half of the sentence the laziness disappeared totally from the speaker's accents.

Mr. Tilson watching him felt his gaze irresistibly drawn from the fair determined face to the spot where the straw hat was lying. With a little gesture of restless incertitude very foreign to his usual complete composure, Mr. Tilson pointed to the big black tin box standing at the young man's right hand.

"Do you see that box?" he asked abruptly, and he cleared his throat after he had spoken as if he felt something impeding his utterance.

Ivor Clay turned his head carelessly.

"Which one?" he exclaimed. "This?" tapping, not the box, but the crown of his own hat as it lay on the lid—and the question was not altogether unnecessary, for the room was lined with similar tin boxes of varying sizes.

Mr. Tilson nodded.

"Read the name on it."

Ivor Clay leaned over in his chair and read aloud the words painted boldly in yellow letters:

EARL OF SITHRINGTON.

There was a moment's pause. Mr. Tilson took a large white silk pocket-handkerchief out of the breast pocket of his coat and began polishing his glasses.

"Is the name familiar to you?" he asked the young man in the leather chair.

"Never heard it before in my life, to my knowledge," was the answer.

Mr. Tilson dropped his glasses with a clatter on the table.

"You are Lord Sithrington's eldest son," he said curtly, and again he cleared his throat as if something was choking him.

Ivor Clay sat bolt upright, his arms resting heavily on the leather arms of the chair.

"Me!" he exclaimed. "But you have always said my father was dead."

"So he is," returned the other.

"Then"—Ivor Clay laughed, but a dim red colour stole over his face up to the roots of his fair hair, and his eyes fixed themselves on the staring yellow letters shining in the oasis of black tin—"I suppose *I'm* the Earl of Sithrington?"

"No."

CHAPTER II.

"No!"

Ivor Clay sprang from his chair.

The elder man raised his hand. "Sit down," he said, quietly, "sit down and hear the whole story. It is time you should know it."

Ivor Clay sank into the leather arm-chair once more, but the flush of colour still lingered in his face and he stared at his friend and guardian steadily, with a straight, unwavering scrutiny characteristic of him. Seen thus, all the hardness in his face became visible to a remarkable degree from beneath the easy kindliness that was its habitual expression.

Mr. Tilson let his glasses fall from his nose, sat back in his swivel chair, and folding his hands one over the other, returned the steady stare of his client by a scrutiny equally steady, but more intent and observant.

"Your father," he began deliberately, noticing the while the tightening of the other's lips at the sound of the words, "your father at the time of his death left it to my discretion to fix the precise date at which you were to hear this story, merely expressing a wish that you should not hear it until you were at least twenty-one years old. I have postponed it, as you will perceive, for a year subsequent to that event, because I did not wish to disturb your mind during the final year of your university course, and also because I was anxious to see how that course would end. It has ended very creditably, very creditably indeed." Mr. Tilson spoke with a somewhat stilted precision, but

the tone of his voice made ample amends for the moderation of his words. "And now, before we go further, and before you finally decide upon your future walk in life and enter upon it, it is right that you should know how you stand."

Mr. Tilson paused for a moment. When he resumed, his accents were drier, more entirely business-like than they had been yet.

"For three generations the Sithrington family have been clients of ours; and when the late lord came to the title, which he did while still a very young man, he honoured my father with a confidence perhaps more than common in such connections. Lord Sithrington, your father, married twice. The first marriage was singularly unfortunate, through no fault on either side, but because a few months after her marriage Lady Sithrington unhappily became insane. At first it was hoped that care and gentleness combined with adequate treatment would effect a cure, and that such could be carried out at home. With this end in view, and in accordance with the best medical advice, a young lady was engaged as companion to Lady Sithrington. Nothing, I believe, could exceed the kindness and attention which the young lady in question brought to her sad task. But, unhappily, nothing that was done proved of the slightest avail. Lady Sithrington became steadily worse, until at the end of a year the physicians were unanimous in their opinion that she should be removed from home. To this her husband was in the end compelled to consent, with the result that his home was practically broken up. Meantime, however, an attachment had sprung up between Lord Sithrington and the young lady just mentioned. You will clearly understand that in this further unhappy complication both parties, namely Lord Sithrington and the young lady, behaved with honour and self-respect. Nor was it until his wife's malady was declared quite hopeless and his domestic happiness entirely at an end, that Lord Sithrington was

betrayed into an avowal of those feelings which for a considerable time had taken possession of his heart. I cannot tell you"—Mr. Tilson cleared his throat—"what arguments he used, but from what I knew of one of the actors concerned, I imagine that his misery and suffering would have been, without any other plea, his strongest passport to her favour and regard; but ultimately he persuaded this lady to go abroad with him, and they lived very quietly, and—very happily I believe, for upwards of two years. They were deeply and devotedly attached to one another, and Lord Sithrington plainly declared his intention of making the lady his wife, should the opportunity of doing so arise—which did not seem likely, as his wife, although hopelessly mad, enjoyed good health physically. But, at the end of two years, Lady Sithrington died, very unexpectedly. Lord Sithrington and the lady of whom I have been speaking were at this time living in a quiet country village in the vicinity of Naples, and"—Mr. Tilson jerked his head nervously and his voice became sharpened slightly—"your birth was expected."

Involuntarily he paused, prepared for an outburst, but Ivor Clay remained perfectly silent, his keen blue eyes fixed steadily on the speaker, and Mr. Tilson resumed quickly:

"It was impossible for your mother then to travel to England; it was equally impossible for Lord Sithrington to remain out of England during his wife's funeral. He left your mother—he never returned to her"—Mr. Tilson's voice failed here curiously and completely, but it was clear and steady again as he proceeded—"for from the moment his wife's breath was out of the body his family never ceased by every device in their power to detach him from your mother. They succeeded. Before his wife was three months dead Lord Sithrington had engaged himself to marry a lady of his family's choosing, a lady in his own set and of equal rank. The marriage took place forthwith; the announce-

ment of it killed your mother——" Mr. Tilson's right hand folded over the left, stirred suddenly and the fingers clenched themselves. "You were born and she died. Acting in Lord Sithrington's behalf, I went out to Italy and brought you home to England. I ought perhaps to explain that owing to ill-health my father had at that time handed over almost the entire conduct of our business to me, and that in that way I had become acquainted both with the first and second Lady Sithrington, and—with your mother."

Ivor Clay looked at the man facing him.

"Tell me," he said slowly, and they were the first words he had yet uttered, "tell me, *honestly*, what sort of woman was—my mother?"

Mr. Tilson lifted his hand, letting it fall impulsively on the desk beneath.

"She was the best and sweetest of women," he said, deliberately; "a lady by birth as well as by education: a gentlewoman in every sense of the word."

The younger man regarded the elder as if he were trying to read him through and through.

"On your honour as a gentleman," he said, hoarsely.

"By all that is sacred," returned the other gravely.

Ivor Clay's eyes flashed.

"I should like to know my mother's name," he said, restrainedly.

"Marie Delahay. She was a French Canadian—that is to say, paternally; her mother, I understand, was an Englishwoman. I believe that she was introduced to the first Lady Sithrington by the rector of the parish." Mr. Tilson turned to a leather despatch-box on the table beside him as he spoke, and took out a little case. "Here," he added, opening the case, and pushing it across the table towards Clay, "is a portrait of your mother, the only one, so far as I am aware, in existence. It was painted at your father's request shortly after they settled in Italy."

Ivor Clay took the case in his hand. It enclosed a miniature, evidently the work of a first-rate artist, representing a young lady of about five-and-twenty years old. It was certainly and unmistakably the portrait of a lady. The face was sweet and lovable rather than beautiful, the rare combination of blue eyes and very dark hair forming perhaps the owner's highest claim to actual beauty. The eyes were clear and candid, betraying a disposition given rather to trustfulness than suspicion.

Her son's fingers closed round the case tightly.

"I am not like my mother," he said slowly, looking up at his friend. The latter returned his gaze for a second before responding.

"No," he said at length, with some hesitation; "and yet there is a look sometimes across the eyes."

"Then," said the other, and his lips curved themselves into a hard sneer, "have I the honour to resemble my—father?"

"Slightly," replied Mr. Tilson, taking no notice of the sneer, "but you are not strikingly like either of your parents. Nine people out of ten are not. At least I have found it so, especially in the case of those who lose their parents in infancy. Likeness, I am persuaded, grows with contact and intimacy. The tones of your voice resemble your father's unquestionably."

Ivor Clay laid the case containing his mother's portrait on the table.

"Is that all?" he asked, quietly.

"Not quite," returned Mr. Tilson. "You will remember that I told you how, acting for Lord Sithrington, I went out to Italy and brought you back to England. I must now tell you that immediately after his second marriage, Lord Sithrington intimated to me his determination to execute a deed of gift whereby your mother would be placed in possession of a very comfortable fortune. Her death alone prevented the execution of that deed, which I had actually drafted roughly; and when

I brought you to England Lord Sithrington instead made a will, by which not only was the fortune destined for your mother bequeathed to you, but was augmented to a very considerable degree indeed; so much so, that the annual income arising from it amounts to something over three thousand pounds."

He watched Ivor Clay's face narrowly as he spoke, but except for a certain hardening of the lips it betrayed no emotion at finding himself the owner of three thousand a year.

"I must say"—Mr. Tilson spoke with peculiarly cold, calm precision—"I must say that it was a very handsome reparation——"

"*What!*"

The word rang through the room till it awoke the faint vibration of an echo from the walls. Ivor Clay was on his feet, facing the man whose words he had cut short. The man sitting in the swivel chair kept his lips from smiling, and his eyes from betraying the warmth that almost escaped them in spite of his efforts. He merely raised his glasses and fixed them deliberately on his nose, with the air of a man whose experience permits him to pardon the exceeding youthfulness of youth. But all the time he was studying his man closely.

Ivor Clay took up his hat. Mr. Tilson tapped his forefinger after a fashion of his upon the open blotter beneath his hand.

"Your father," he resumed, as composedly as though no interruption had occurred, and taking no overt notice of the resolution plainly expressed by the younger man's seizure of his hat, "bestowed the utmost care and consideration upon your concerns. Your education and up-bringing he requested me to superintend. I was to be your guardian, standing, so far as you were to be made aware, in the place of your parents, who, he wished you to understand, were both dead. At a considerable sacrifice of his feelings Lord Sithrington, after you had grown old enough to recognise and

remember him, abstained entirely from seeing you. But his plans for your future were carefully sketched. He desired that you should be sent to Harrow, which was done; if you chose a university career, Cambridge was to be the university; your college, Trinity. If you preferred the army you were to be given your choice of the best regiments in the service. Arrived at manhood you would find yourself the possessor of a private fortune amply sufficient to enable you to live like a gentleman, and more than sufficient to secure for you a good start in whatever career your tastes inclined you to enter upon. Your father, as I have told you, is dead. But everything has been done as he desired. I have nothing now left to do, but to put you formally into possession of your inheritance, first of all detailing to you the sources of your fortune. We can go into that this moment if you wish. My time is entirely at your disposal."

"May I ask," said Ivor Clay, suddenly interposing, "if there is an Earl of Sithrington at present, and if so, who he is?"

"The present Lord Sithrington is a boy at Eton. He is the son of your father's second r e—the only son. Your father had but the two—, ourself, and the present successor to the title."

"Is Lady Sithrington alive?"

"She is."

"And may I ask," said Ivor Clay, shrewdly, "what *her* opinion might be of my father's will?"

For the first time in the whole interview Mr. Tilson laughed.

"My boy," he exclaimed laughingly, dropping the lawyer in the guardian and friend, "go to the Bar by all means; you'll do."

Ivor Clay's face relaxed not a whit.

Mr. Tilson spread out his hands.

"Lady Sithrington's opinion may be summed up in six words—she wanted to dispute the will. We had considerable difficulty in persuading her not to do so. I implored her, for her own sake, for her

husband's sake, and above all for her children's sake, to make no such attempt. It would have been as futile as mistaken. She had no shadow of a case to take into court. Lord Sithrington died at forty-eight of pneumonia, after a week's illness. Prior to that he had been mentally and physically in perfect health. Never at any time had his mental condition been questioned. Neither could undue influence be asserted, seeing that your mother was dead when the will was made and you were only a few months old. Lord Sithrington made the will deliberately. Never was one made more so. There was not the shadow of chance of upsetting it. Of course"—Mr. Tilson shrugged his shoulders —"her ladyship was not content with *my* opinion. She must needs have the opinion of eminent counsel. She had it. And it was identical with mine. I knew too that her children were amply provided for. The Sithrington family have always been rich, and since the discovery of coal on their northern estates they have been very wealthy indeed. Ultimately Lady Sithrington was brought to hear reason, the will was proved and she took out letters of administration. I shall read you the provisions dealing with yourself presently."

Mr. Tilson paused, a little out of breath, though he had spoken with his accustomed deliberation. Ivor Clay, still standing before him with his hat in his hand, asked yet another question.

"Was my mother absolutely penniless?"

"Not absolutely," replied the lawyer, accurately. "She had a small independence that produced about seventy pounds a year. At least it has done so, since it came under my management."

"Then," said Ivor Clay, "*that* is mine."

"Yes; for whether it was that your mother had cut herself adrift from her family, or they had cast her off, I do not know; but none of her family since her death have made any claim to the money, and it is there at the present moment for your use."

The younger man's eyes were fixed and dreamy. He seemed to be considering some matter in his own mind strenuously. With an effort he roused himself.

"I suppose," he observed, quietly, "that I can have the miniature. There is no one but myself who can have the faintest interest in its preservation."

"It is yours." Mr. Tilson took up the case with a certain abruptness and held it out, not quite steadily, to his client.

Had Ivor Clay been an older, or a more experienced, or a less self-absorbed man at that moment, the gesture would have told him something. As it was it told him nothing. And the one element of romance in Mr. Tilson's life remained undiscovered then and for ever.

Ivor Clay put the miniature in the breast pocket of his coat.

"If there is nothing more that I ought to hear," he said, huskily, "I—I—think I will go now." His eyes fell once more upon the yellow letters of the big tin box, and a sudden flush darkened his face. "Is the young gentleman at Eton aware of my existence?" he asked, his eyes still on the letters that spelt SITHRINGTON.

Mr. Tilson stood up from his chair. Something in the face and in the pose of the down-bent eyes struck him. He came round beside the young man and laid a hand on his shoulder affectionately.

"My dear fellow," he said, sensibly, "you have the whole world before you, *he*—has the House of Lords. You have had an education which could not have been surpassed had you been a prince of the blood. You have health and strength and ample means. You have been well cared for——"

"Thanks to you," interrupted Ivor Clay, and Mr. Tilson smiled with undisguised gratification.

"Believe me, it has been one of the great pleasures of my life, the share I have taken in your upbringing," he returned, emphatically, "and I am

firmly persuaded that you will justify all my hopes for your future. Meantime, think over that future carefully. If, as you have latterly seemed to wish, you decide on public life, you see it will be quite open to you to do so without adopting any profession—the Bar for instance. You are quite rich enough to enter the House of Commons without delay."

Ivor Clay looked at the speaker as he said this, with the same curiously intent, yet abstracted gaze, as if his mind were all the time pursuing some difficult line of thought independent of the outward attention he was constrained to bestow on Mr. Tilson's words.

"I think I should like to go now," he said again, slowly.

"Where do you mean to go?" asked the elder man, his hand tightening its grasp on Clay's shoulder.

"To Cambridge," was the reply, "for the next few days at all events."

"You will come to me again and let me know your plans," said Mr. Tilson, relaxing his hold. "Remember, we have yet to go into your affairs financially."

"I will come, certainly."

"Then good-bye, my boy, and God bless you!"

He grasped the young man's hand and wrung it cordially.

Ivor Clay looked at his old friend straight between the eyes.

"Mr. Tilson," he said, boyishly, "it's a damned bad world, but you have been uncommonly kind to me."

He disengaged his hand from the grasp of his old friend, and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

IVOR CLAY left the offices of Messrs. Tilson, Staters, and Claim, feeling profoundly convinced that this world was a very bad one.

It is a conviction that seizes most people at least once in the course of their lives, and the pre-determining cause of it not seldom arises from a sudden sense of personal injury. As Ivor Clay went down to Cambridge that day he experienced for the first time a bitter realisation of how poor a thing human nature is, and how intolerable, or rather how exasperating it is that such a miserable thing should yet have the power of making or marring the lives of men and women. He did not arrive at Cambridge until the day was pretty far advanced, for on quitting Mr. Tilson's presence he wandered about the streets in a vague, indeterminate way, not very clear, despite his avowed desire to return to Cambridge, of what he wanted to do next, or whither his footsteps were tending. After a while, however, the natural cravings of youth and health embodied in the awakening of a sturdy appetite, brought him for a time out of the region of wounded feelings and conflicting thoughts into the actual world of commonplace necessity—in other words, Ivor Clay began to be aware that before he went much further or sought any solution for disturbing problems, he must have something to eat. Accordingly he got into a hansom and drove to St. Pancras, where it must be said he managed to make a very fair meal, although the demands of his physical appetite satisfied, the larger cravings of mind and heart became clamorous once more.

As he strode up and down the various platforms of the station—for he had a pretty long wait for his train—it seemed to him that he had lived a hundred lives since he left Cambridge that morning, and that in all those hundred lives there was not to be found one good or gracious incident.

More than once, indeed at every opportunity he could find, he took out the miniature of his mother and studied it intently. It was as if he were trying to wring from the mere painting the secret heart of the living woman, as if he expected that the contemplation of his mother's portrait would reveal to him that mother herself.

His own sense of personal injury, deep, exasperating, insufferable as it was, had a correlative in an equally clear sense of the dire injury and indignity to which his mother had been subjected. The two, distinct at first, became subsequently so closely interwoven, that he himself would have found it almost impossible to define the point at which the one began and the other ended.

Sitting in the train staring unseeingly at the long run of flat fields that flashed past the windows of the railway carriage, fields that grew flatter and more monotonous as the train drew nearer to Cambridge, his thoughts surged and swayed, now this way, now that, until the very processes of reason seemed confused, almost submerged. Life to him hitherto had been such a simple thing. Unconsciously Ivor Clay had felt a certain pitying contempt for those people and that sort of literature that makes so much ado about life, its conditions, its circumstances, its incidents. Unconsciously he had always found it so much easier to *live* than to think about life, or what life meant. People and books told him frequently, did he care to listen to them, that life was a disappointment often enough, that it was a struggle often enough, but that it was a complex cosmos always—one too, in which the proper adjustment of its elements was so difficult as to be nearly impossible. Well, for his part,

such people and books had not disturbed him. Those people may have been right, those books undoubtedly trustworthy treatises on such matters, only all such matters mattered so little to him. If the world were a complex cosmos, what of it? *his* position in it was clear enough at all events—at least hitherto he had always believed it to be so. And now—now it was clear enough too. Intolerably clear. Nay, the eyes of the world itself were focussed steadily, so it seemed to him now, on that very position of his in the world—he had reached this point in the meditations of a twenty-two-year-old view of life, before the train finally came to a standstill in the station at Cambridge—and as he left the platform of the Great Eastern Railway behind him and came out into the evening air, he fancied too that the very cab-drivers outside the station, many of whom knew him perfectly well, must know all about his position also; he even went so far as to imagine that they had known it all along, and to trace upon their countenances a reflection of the amusement which no doubt the sight of him must inspire. He got into a hansom with these agreeable feelings in his breast, and drove down the long length of Hill's Road feeling as if all the glances, and all the comments, and all the innuendoes that doubtless the sight of him had called into existence, were pursuing him, hanging on to the back of his cab like so many little mischievous imps, or like the street urchins, whenever they get the chance. Nevertheless, he was glad to find himself back at Cambridge again.

Amid the surroundings that had formed so integral a portion of his daily life for nearly four years, and in the atmosphere of quiet which envelops the university at that particular portion of the year, he felt he would be better able to think. He wanted to think over the past, the present, and the future carefully, and this was a convenient spot for the purpose. Thinking was a new and uncomfortable necessity, forced upon him

for the first time. He felt the need of a large circumference wherein to make a movement so irksome and so unaccustomed. He crept up to his rooms—which were in the first court of Trinity, not far from those in which Newton dwelt—with every desire to avoid recognition as far as might be, glad when he remembered that his special friends had gone down. He met one man on the stairs, an undergraduate who "kept" in rooms on the same landing; he contented himself with a passing nod to Clay, and a passing question, namely: "Hullo, are you up for the 'Long'?"

Ivor answered the question vaguely and undecidedly. It was one that was put to him by every creature he met in the university during the ensuing days, with the further enquiry from those who were so intimately acquainted with him as to know something of his aims, whether he had decided to remain "up" for another year in order to read Law. To this also he would mutter an equally undecided response. Whereupon the several enquirers would treat him to an exhaustive list of those who were staying up and those who had gone down or were going down, until, in his newly awakened tendency to reflection, it seemed to Ivor Clay that the jargon of the university embodied a very fair parable of life; for in life you had your day, and in your day you came up and went down, and came up again, till finally you went down for good and all, and some one else came up in your stead, and there was an end of you. A reflection which was no doubt very trite, and far from original, except to its author, who was so new to reflections, and to whom conversely reflections were so new also, that he felt a faint gleam of gratification at the notion that his parable of life was quite his own discovery.

He sat down now in one of the windows of his rooms (which looked out over the great court), in a manner very aimless for him. The window boxes outside were ablaze with scarlet geranium and blue

lobelia and the scent of the mignonette was wafted pleasantly up to his face as he threw open the window. A sleek tabby cat of discreet mien and bearing, who was pacing languorously across the grass beneath towards the fountain, stopped short at the sound of the opening window and looked up at him. In the cool glare of her shining green eyes, there was an expression which seemed to say to the young man at the open window above her:

"Yes, here I am, enjoying what you dare not venture upon, a pleasant stroll over the cool verdant sward. For I may walk here where you may not; yea, verily, I may sit upon the grass and wash my face"—and sit upon the grass and wash her face she did, not even so much as turning her head when the angry barking of a dog sounded from the street without; for, as she well knew, the enemy of Cat dare not show his nose within college gates at Cambridge, so that it was no wonder that her every attitude seemed to say: "How good it is to be a cat in Cambridge, and how enlightened is the university which allows a well-regulated puss the privileges and freedom too often denied elsewhere!"

Ivor Clay kept very much to himself during the days that followed. When he got tired of sitting in his rooms he generally went down to Garret Hostel Bridge and got a punt and sculled himself up the river. He wanted to be alone, and, in the Long, you can generally accomplish your desires in that respect without much difficulty. The river was pretty crowded with boats, generally manned by "townees," who, arrayed in garments as closely resembling 'Varsity fashions as was permitted to them, took their young lady friends up and down unweariedly during the summer afternoons. On the day following his interview with Mr. Tilson, Ivor Clay, partly to escape from the dragging monotony of his thoughts, and partly, on the other hand, by way of seeking a better oppor-

tunity for clearer thought, took the punt up to Byron's Pool. He pulled along doggedly, for the Cam is not a satisfactory stream to the boatman, being full of weeds, and as a matter of fact so dirty just then that Ivor Clay never reached Byron's Pool at all, but turned the boat and sculled back again. A lady, probably the wife of one of the dons, was having a tea pic-nic in the fields half way up the river to Byron's Pool. Possibly her party likewise had been bound for the latter favourite spot, but had, like the clock of the song, "stopped short," tired with an unavailing struggle with the weeds, for the boats in which the party had come were moored close by the bank. Ivor Clay looked at the party with a moody brow and shot past quickly. Two or three girls and a man—a King's man to judge from his blazer and the violet and white ribbon on his straw hat—were trying to make a kettle boil. What an ass the fellow seemed, thought Ivor angrily, and how extraordinary it is that nice girls tolerate the inane asses of men they frequently do! Because, you see, the world has gone wrong with Ivor Clay; and he was even cross enough to feel angry with the girls themselves, as the echo of their merry laughter pursued him down the river.

He brought the punt back with the beautiful long swinging stroke that he had hoped one day would help to bring the 'Varsity boat to victory over that classic course from Putney to Mortlake, and moored it alongside the banks under the willows, where the reach of the river runs by the Library of Trinity, and he spent hours on that day and others following, lying motionless in the boat, his eyes dreamily staring at the tower of John's as its pinnacles stood up against the sky line in front, while the sunlight trickled down on him through the weeping weight of the willow-branches bending over till they touched the water's brim.

It was a novel experience for Ivor Clay to feel his body motionless and his mind working unceas-

ingly. So great was the awakening of the dormant spiritual part of him, that he was conscious of a new and hitherto unsuspected appeal in the very face of Nature all around him. The winding sweep of the river—clear and glassy just here, the green expanse of the lawn of Kings and Clare, the interlacing foliage that spread itself before the buildings of St. John's, the graceful arches of the bridges: all this fell upon his sight with a new and totally unexpected beauty; all, up to this so familiar and so unheeded, merely accepted blindly as a part of the gracious routine of his, Ivor Clay's, pleasant course of life—a small bit out of what he had felt due to him from life. But now indeed the face of Nature was touched with the beauty wherewith a quickened moral consciousness, suddenly called into being, can invest it. Moreover, the pathos of leave-taking shadowed these days. For Ivor Clay knew that were he to adopt the course that, from first to last, let his thoughts turn which way they would, appeared to him the only one possible, there would be no more pleasant days in this place, which only now seemed to be set before him in its true beauty; no staying up to read Law, or anything else; no more of the gracious easy life that so long as he could remember he had looked upon as his as a matter of course. It did not seem an easy thing to give that life up: although the first impulse that had leaped up within him and shouted in his ear, was, that no man, fit to call himself a man, could do otherwise. Nevertheless, it did not seem easy now; and thus it was that side by side with the new-born recognition of his duty towards himself, there grew deeper the hatred of that which had made such duty imperative. The hatred grew up in the glorious summer sunshine amid the sweet peacefulness of the scenes in which he was placed; and the more it grew, the more intent became the necessity for a certain plan of action, the more impossible still any course but the one.

The thought of his mother was perpetually present to him during those long hours of meditation—no, not meditation, but struggle : a struggle none the less real and intense because it was waged in silence and privacy by a young man stretched, as the superficial onlooker would have declared, at his ease, in a luxurious pleasure boat, amid sunshine and flowers and fresh sunlit loveliness and all things pleasant. The figure of his mother presented itself before his imagination with extraordinary realism. Extraordinary, because in Ivor Clay the imagination was not a dominant or even a predominant quality. It was at the utmost only that rough-hewn variety of the more purely intellectual faculty, to be found in the man of action. Not the best, therefore, wherein to conjure up shapes and forms from out a past never visible to the owner's mortal eyes. Yet just now his imagination even proved equal to the task of constructing around the shadowy outlines of his mother's form, out of the scanty materials at his disposal, the world in which she must have dwelt; the circumstances that moulded her life ; the very atmosphere of hope and fear, of brief happiness and dire despair that encompassed her.

Whenever the lure of his own ambition tempted him to end the struggle by relinquishing the course of action that all through his heart suggested, the figure of his mother, crossing silently the line of his mind's vision, drew him back with strong cords of feeling to his first impulse. And this was no small achievement, for Ivor Clay had very distinct and definite ambitions; was among the few people, and the still fewer men of his own age and class, who know perfectly well what they want, and mean to have it. To get what he wanted, he knew also, would be comparatively easy were he to make a sacrifice of that which so many persons would declare had no real existence at all, but which to him existed as really and truly as his own entity. To get what he wanted after

making such a sacrifice, would be, if not absolutely impossible, to say the least of it, far from probable.

Yet make the sacrifice he realised that he must. Nevertheless, it would not be strictly accurate to ascribe the entire responsibility of the sacrifice he was about to make altogether to the awakening of a true realisation of his mother's actual personality and the revelation of her life-history, for it had its roots in other qualities in Ivor Clay's character —qualities which he had inherited, though not from her, divergent, paradoxical, but strong determining influences all the same.

Thus day after day went by, every day the Cam opposite Trinity sufficing as a battle ground. Every day the whispering willows were the safe and silent witnesses of a warfare the most stupendous, for the hosts of the invisible combatants drawn up on either side were none other than forces than which none more significant can touch a human soul.

Day after day the one host advanced very stealthily, but very surely, one step nearer to final victory.

To drop metaphor, Ivor Clay took seven days to choose between two courses; and considering what the choice involved, the time spent in deciding was wonderfully short.

On the seventh day, a glorious midsummer afternoon, he walked up from Garret Hostel Bridge to his rooms for the last time.

He had left the boats, and the smooth river, and the soft sweet trees behind him; and with them he left also a certain portion of his life forever.

He went back to his rooms and wrote out a telegraph form. When he had written it, he stood up from the table, and walked up and down the room quickly. His hands were clenched to his sides and his lips were very slightly apart. He looked as men sometimes do who are training for a race, "doing a sprint," as they call it, to test their progress. He came back to the table after a

moment and took up the form upon which he had just written. His hat, the straw hat with the Trinity colours that had lain upon the tin box of the Earls of Sithrington, had been tossed off when he came in; now he picked it up and put it on his head again. He opened the door of his room and with the telegraph form in his hand walked down the stairs quickly. It satisfied and relieved some curious feeling straining within his breast to send the telegram himself, personally. As he went down the stairs a man met him face to face.

"Well," said the man, "are you going to stay up for another year?"

"No," said Ivor Clay, briefly.

The man to whose question he thus replied nodded carelessly and passed on; Ivor Clay went on his way likewise, swiftly and decisively. Only as he went there came to him, as it had come to him many, many times during the preceding days, the thought that with everything else must go the last hope of winning his Blue; that never now could he hope to bear his part in bringing home the 'Varsity boat to a glorious victory; never on that famous day find himself one of the chosen eight, straining every nerve and muscle in the great "Derby of the Thames"; never feel the cold March wind blowing in his face, as the boat flies faster through the grey river to the finish, and the pulses are beating in the ears, and the heart thumping against the ribs, as from the surging crowd on bank and bridge and steamer is heard the shout from a thousand lips and throats, the shout so glorious to the ears:

"Light blues ahead!"

And then more glorious still the shout of his fellows in deafening acclamation:

"Well pulled, well pulled!"

No, it was not for him, that Phyrric victory. His lips closed firmly on the thought, as if indeed the very vision of it were by the movement shut away from him definitely and for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. TILSON noted the firmly set lines of the lips, when Ivor Clay stood before him the following morning. Standing there unsmilingly, Ivor could see the telegram that he had dispatched from Cambridge the day before, lying loosely, half torn across, in the waste-paper basket at Mr. Tilson's foot. His quick, long sight recognised easily his own name on the pink paper, and a sudden sense of what was involved in that message smote him sharply. The thought of all that he was relinquishing hurt him physically, so much so that for the moment he found a difficulty in speaking. His eyes travelled slowly meanwhile from the torn telegram in the waste-paper basket to the yellow letters of the name—SITHRINGTON—on the black tin box opposite, and a flush swept over his face, as his gaze rested on the name for a second. The flush receding presently left him pale, but with lips still firmly set as before. Mr. Tilson watching him narrowly, noted the ebb and flow of colour in his face, and purposely refrained from uttering one word. Both men were so engrossed with their several thoughts and feelings that neither had yet sat down, nor had Mr. Tilson invited his client to do so—an oversight unusual in a man so punctilious. But at that moment Mr. Tilson's whole heart and soul and mind were fixed upon other than outward punctilio.

Ivor Clay at length raised his eyes to his old friend's face.

"You asked me," he said slowly, finding his

voice with an effort, "to come and tell you what I had decided upon, as soon as I had decided upon anything. First of all then"—his voice grew more tense, but not a whit more quick—"I have decided that my father was—a scoundrel."

Mr. Tilson raised his hand deprecatingly. He was an old-fashioned man in many respects; amongst others, in the belief that the fact of parentage should be sufficient under all circumstances to tie a child's tongue. Ivor Clay took not the slightest notice of the gesture.

"That being so," he continued, with the manner of one who merely states a fact demonstrable to the meanest intelligence, "I have further decided that I will not live on his money."

Mr. Tilson started. Thirty years of an extensive and highly respectable practice as a solicitor and as the head of an eminent firm had not prepared him for such a statement as this.

"My dear boy," he stammered quickly, lapsing as he commonly did with Ivor Clay from the man of business to the affectionate guardian, "what on earth do you mean?"

"Exactly what I have said." Ivor Clay's eyes glittered, but their glance was clear and direct. "I will take my mother's money and on that, for the future, I will live or starve."

Mr. Tilson sank into his swivel chair.

"Sit down," he said, waving his hand.

But Ivor Clay would not sit down. He seemed to feel a sort of moral and physical support in standing uprightly, squarely planted upon his two feet.

"Your mother's money," said Mr. Tilson, "produces a yearly income of exactly seventy-three pounds eighteen shillings and nine-pence."

"Then," was the response, "my yearly income—for the present—must be, exactly seventy-three pounds, eighteen shillings—isn't it?—and nine-pence."

"Are you aware," said the elder man, staring at him fixedly, "that since you went to Cambridge

you have been spending at the rate of five hundred a year?"

"It is quite possible," was the cool remark. "I am sorry for it leaves a bigger balance of debt to be cleared off."

At the word "debt" Mr. Tilson pricked up his ears, like an old war horse at the smallest note of a bugle.

"'Debt'?" he repeated, stiffly; "you have not told me up to this, that your allowance was insufficient."

Ivor Clay's lips barely parted in a faint smile.

"A bigger balance of debt from me to my father," he said in explanation; "and that reminds me," he went on deliberately, while Mr. Tilson still stared at him, feeling as if he himself were dreaming, "I want you to kindly tell me, if you can, about how much money altogether has been spent upon me and my education. In short, what have I cost since I was born?"

Mr. Tilson smiled good-humouredly—the request sounded to his ears saner than any other utterance just then of the speaker's.

"With pleasure," he exclaimed, quickly; "I can make it out to the farthing, my dear fellow, if you will give me a day or two and a sheet of paper."

"Perhaps you could give me a rough idea now," persisted the other.

"Certainly, certainly. Well, let me see." Mr. Tilson made a rapid mental calculation, while Ivor Clay stood silently in front of him. "Umph, umph, well, you have been generously treated, there has been no stint anywhere. I should say, taking everything into account, your Harrow and Cambridge days have cost not less than three or four thousand pounds, and, for the rest, well, let us put the total roughly, at five thousand. It may be a trifle over, or a trifle under, but I should say there or thereabouts."

"Thank you," said Ivor Clay, gravely; "it will take me some years to pay off that."

Mr. Tilson laughed out quite loudly. The outburst was entirely involuntary, though he checked himself when he saw the other's face. Ivor Clay smiled grimly.

"But it shall be done," he concluded, resolutely.

Henry Tilson regarded his young friend much as he might have looked at the antics of an intelligent baby.

"May I ask," he began, satirically, "to what purpose you intend to divert the very handsome fortune of which your father has put you in possession?"

His client stared at him blankly for a moment, nonplussed by the strict legal phraseology in which the question was couched.

"I neither know nor care," he replied at length, confusedly. "I don't care a rap what becomes of it."

Mr. Tilson raised his eyebrows.

"Nevertheless *there* it remains, and *yours* it is."

Ivor Clay took a quick step forward and his hands clenched themselves.

"Do you mean to tell me," and he raised his voice, perceptibly, "that that cursed money is mine, whether I like it or not?"

Mr. Tilson ventured to remark that as the law of the land still stood, that was so.

Ivor Clay drew in his breath.

"And I," he said, and there was a look of something akin to apprehension on his face, "and I must take it?"

"There is no question of taking," was the reply, "it is yours."

Ivor Clay brought one clenched fist down on the writing-table with a bang that made Mr. Tilson jump in his chair.

"Damn it!" he said, and he spoke through his teeth, "but I won't take a penny of it. Do you mean to tell me"—and he nearly shouted out the words—"that I am obliged to take that money and spend it?"

Mr. Tilson smiled indulgently.

"You can certainly refrain from spending the money," he responded, suavely, "if you wish."

"Oh, then that's all right," said the boy, and he said it boyishly, and his guardian smiled in spite of himself. "I only want to make it clear," continued the speaker, forcibly, "that let what will become of it, *I* won't touch it. You understand?" he added, with a sudden violence.

"Perfectly," returned Mr. Tilson, imperturbably. "In that event it will accumulate for your children."

Ivor Clay's face reddened.

"Do you suppose," he said, speaking a little unsteadily, "that I will let my children, if I ever have any, take the price of—my mother's shame?"

The elder man dropped his eyes suddenly. Into them had flashed for one second an answering spark of sympathy with the hot youthful words literally hurled at him from the younger man's lips.

Ivor Clay threw back his head and laughed a short hoarse laugh.

"No," he said, curtly, "never! and my father was a——"

Mr. Tilson again lifted a deprecating hand.

"My boy," he said, quietly, "I do not think you ought to speak in that way of your father, whatever you may think."

The young man looked at him squarely.

"I think it," he said, defiantly, "and I will say it. but I won't think and say it and live on his money at the same time—no, by heaven, I won't!" He threw back his head with a movement characteristic of him. "Tell Lady Sithrington that her fears will not be realised. Fire her over the money which she was so indignant at the prospect of losing. For me I will never touch it."

Mr. Tilson stood up quickly and laid one hand impulsively on the speaker's shoulder.

"Ivor," he said, warmly, "I understand, I understand"—he paused, and the habitual caution and prudence of the lawyer reasserted itself—"but I

scarcely think you realise what the course you are proposing to yourself entails. My dear, dear boy—quiet, hear me out—one thing is certain; feelings and predispositions notwithstanding, we must all live. You are a young man, you must live. You cannot dig"—Mr. Tilson smiled—"you know the rest of it. In the rank of life to which you belong and for which you have been educated, nothing is clearer than that you cannot possibly live on an income of seventy pounds."

"I will do it," muttered Ivor Clay doggedly, and the middle-aged cautious lawyer felt his heart go out to the youth and the obstinacy of the words. "I will do it, until I make more to put to it." He looked at his guardian and friend. "Do not imagine," he said quickly, "that I have not thought about it, for I have."

"I am sure you have," was the response, "but you see you know so little of life."

It was a mistake, this speech; for two-and-twenty knows so much of life—everything in fact that there is to know—in its own estimation.

Ivor Clay set his lips hardly. He did not speak. But a whole volume of determined assertion could scarcely have expressed more than those tightly closed lips.

"Your father—" began Mr. Tilson again.

"My father," said Ivor Clay, catching up the words, "was an unmitigated blackguard. I don't suppose you can deny that."

Mr. Tilson dropped into his swivel chair and folded his hands quietly one over the other. He looked up at the younger man reflectively.

"No," he said musingly, and with the air of a man who is determined to do justice even at the expense of his own personal feeling in the matter. "No, I do not think he was."

"Not!" was the hot retort, "though he murdered my mother and lived happily in honour and luxury to the end of his days!"

Mr. Tilson lifted his eyebrows. "He lived as a

peer usually lives in England. As to his living happily"—he shook his head. "No, I do not think Lord Sithrington lived happily."

"I don't care whether he did or not," cried the other, sneeringly. "I suppose," he continued, with a curious lapse of sequence that amused his auditor, "that by the time a man's been thirty years a lawyer he doesn't know good from bad. *I'm* not a lawyer, however, and so it strikes me that my precious father was as bad as one might reasonably expect."

Mr. Tilson raised his head composedly.

"I have met better men than Lord Sithrington," he observed, quietly, "and I have met worse."

"Possibly"—the younger man spoke shortly; "at all events, all I wish to say is, that I won't take his money."

The elder man looked at the younger narrowly. Did he realise what his words meant? Mr. Tilson could not believe that he did. He stood up from his chair again.

"Ivor," he said, very seriously, "you are a very young man, but you have had for a long time now certain very definite ambitions. Do you know how your hopes for the future will be affected—for your whole career will be affected—if you seriously persist in the course you have just indicated?"

A quick spasm of mingled regret and indecision twisted Ivor Clay's face.

"I know," he whispered, hoarsely, "I know it must all go!" He straightened himself then and the dogged resolution settled down on every feature of his face once more. "Let it," he added, determinedly, "let it go, I stick to what I said."

Mr. Tilson looked at him, and it seemed to him that for the present certainly, opposition would only strengthen the resolution which he could see had taken such firm possession.

"That being so," he observed blandly, with apparent acquiescence in the other's express determination, "may I ask if you have formed any further plans?"

"I won't stay in England," answered Ivor Clay, bluntly.

"Why?"

"England," said the young man, "is the home of vested interests. Clearly, then, it is no place for me."

The words were magniloquent, more magniloquent than accurate. But Ivor Clay was still a very young man. Henry Tilson barely saved himself from smiling. It did not appear to him that a country in which a man holds property to an extent that it brings in an annual return of three thousand pounds and upwards, could be rightly accused of not containing a vested interest for that man. But he took no trouble to controvert either the accuracy or the wisdom of the statement.

"And may I ask where you contemplate going to?" was all he said.

"God knows!" said the other, bitterly. Then his eye caught that of his old friend. "Don't be afraid," he added quickly, with a change of tone, "I don't mean to go to the devil wherever I go. Oh, no"—his face changed again and his lips smiled rather an ugly smile—"I sha'n't go to the devil I assure you; I might meet my father there, you see." He turned on his heel abruptly. "My plans," he said a second later, as Mr. Tilson's voice did not fill up the pause, "are scarcely settled yet, but I will let you know where you can pay the interest of my mother's money to." He faced round again then suddenly, and grasping the elder man's hand, wrung it warmly. "I'll do all right, no fear," he said, his face brightening unexpectedly in a way characteristic of it; "and, by the way, I want to know about my name?"

Mr. Tilson smiled.

"Your Christian name was chosen for you, because it was one for which your father had frequently heard your mother express a preference; your surname—well"—Mr. Tilson smiled more blandly—"*I* gave you that, I'm sure I don't know

why, except that it struck me as sounding well with your Christian name."

Ivor Clay nodded good-humouredly as Mr. Tilson concluded his speech. He turned then towards the door. But just as he reached the latter he paused yet once more.

"Was—my father—a Conservative or a Liberal?" he asked, abruptly.

"He was a Conservative," was the reply; "the Sithringtons have always been Tories."

"Thank you," said Ivor Clay, and what he meant by it Mr. Tilson was left to conjecture, for he vouchsafed no explanation.

"He has character," said Henry Tilson to himself a few minutes later, "and he has generosity as his father had. He is annoyed just now because I will not join him in abusing his father, which would do no good, and only increase the bitterness that he feels in having to own obligations to him. I like his feeling with regard to the money. It does him credit. He is generous; he is like his father."

Ivor Clay would have been very much surprised and very incredulous had any one told him that certain instincts which he had all his life possessed were an inheritance from his father. Nevertheless it was none the less true. Mr. Tilson had been right when he said that there were worse men than Lord Sithrington had been. He had assuredly been no saint, and no hero; nevertheless, between the hero and the dastard there are many degrees. Lord Sithrington had been quite capable of doing an evil and unrighteous thing, but he had not been capable of doing it without knowing that it was evil and unrighteous. He had yielded to the pressure put upon him by his family, but he had never quite recovered from the shock of self-contempt which he experienced when he discovered that he was not strong enough or brave enough to defy his family. He had deserted the woman he loved devotedly, and he had married a woman for whom

he entertained no feeling whatever—not even aversion; but he had not been able (as his son had scornfully accused him) to live happily afterwards. It is doubtful whether in any case he would or could have lived happily after his second marriage, but the death of Ivor's mother had rendered the possibility of it out of the question. So far as Ivor's mother was concerned, probably the happiest thing that could have befallen her was death. At all events death secured to her a deathless hold upon the heart of the man, who knew as well as though the law of man had found him guilty of murder, that his act had killed her. Death elevated his very ordinary love for her into a passion of remorse and unavailing regret, a passion that found its only satisfaction in surrounding even her memory with a tenderness that was almost sacred; while at the same time, his natural generosity instinctively moved him to confer upon her son every possible benefit that he could devise for him. Mr. Tilson was only speaking the bare truth when he told Ivor Clay that it was at a considerable sacrifice of personal inclination that his father had deliberately cut himself away from him. Neither Henry Tilson nor anybody else had ever known how great the sacrifice had been, how passionately Lord Sithrington clung to the one bequest and the one tie left to him by the woman he had loved. He had left Ivor a very large fortune, but, large as it might seem in the eyes of others, in his father's estimation it was far too small to represent any adequate payment of the immense debt which he believed he owed to his son and to the mother of his son. The older he grew the more it seemed to him that his debt towards the dead woman grew and increased. The longing to atone, the longing to expiate, common to every man or woman who has done deliberate violence to his or her own inherent generosity, tormented him. If he could have left Ivor his title and estates he would have done so only too gladly;

that he could not do so added to the torment of unavailing regret.

When Ivor Clay felt that to take money from his father was to insult his mother's memory the feeling did him honour, but it was one that he owed to his father. Mr. Tilson had seen in Ivor Clay's attitude in this matter, the inherited generosity of the father clearly apparent in the son. That was why he repeated more than once to himself the words "He is generous, like his father"; and Henry Tilson, with an experience of many men, liked the boy for it.

"But as to sticking to it"—Mr. Tilson smiled —"he will never stick to it. He knows nothing of life, nothing; when he learns a little in the hard school of experience, he will find reason to modify his views."

Mr. Tilson did not distress himself further about it just then. He wished to give Ivor Clay time to recover himself—that, he was persuaded was all he needed. As to persisting in refusing to accept the use of three thousand a year, Mr. Tilson had not yet met the man, good or bad, who could deliberately refuse to accept three thousand a year, and who could stick to the refusal for any length of time.

"No, he will not do *that*," he thought.

Nevertheless, he did.

CHAPTER V.

"MY DEAR MOTHER.

"You will be surprised to see a letter in my illustrious handwriting, seeing that I wrote a long yarn to the Governor by the last mail. But this is not a long yarn, merely a line to let you know that Ivor Clay goes to England at once, and that his address will be the Hotel Albemarle, and that he is, if you please, to find a letter there asking him to go down and see you all and pay you a visit at Longhaise. Now, don't get into a fuss and say you don't entertain and all that sort of rot. And don't let the Governor say that Ivor Clay is a dangerous man, and that in the present state of affairs in this 'ere bloomin' country,' he doesn't quite care to become very intimate with Mr. Ivor Clay. Take a word from me. Ivor Clay at the present moment is one of the most prominent and powerful men in the Queen's dominions; what he may be very shortly, I am not going to say, only it will be—certainly—'Friend, go up higher.' He is an old Harrow boy and a very charming fellow, so he won't frighten the County with his looks and his manners, and he is a perfect cosmopolitan, and so he won't cram his private (or public) opinions down anybody's throat. Last of all he's the best friend I ever had in the world, and I shouldn't have a bit to eat or a bed to lie on in this country but for his friendship. And this ought to go *some* way with you and the Governor. Love to everybody from yours as usual.

"E. T. L."

The lady to whom this letter was addressed looked up when she had mastered the contents of it.

"My dear," she said to her husband, who was reading his letters at the opposite end of the breakfast table, "Teddy, dear boy, says——"

A girl who was also reading her letters at the side of the table, cried at this point, "Susan Romer will come, mother?"

Her mother took no notice of her.

"Frank," she persisted, raising her voice slightly, "Teddy says Mr. Clay's coming to England, and we're to have him here."

"Oh, we are, are we?" responded her husband, whose attention she had succeeded in rousing. "Ted's a confounded young scapegrace—he'll never do a bit of good in this world."

Teddy's mother waved Teddy's letter excitedly. "Indeed, Frank, you're very unkind. My poor darling, think of him away in that dreadful country; and I am sure he is a dear good boy, for Mr. Clay is so fond of him. 'A powerful prominent man,'"—unconsciously quoting the letter—"like that."

"Humph!" said her husband; "a pretty name I'll get in the County entertaining Mr. Ivor Clay, save the mark!"

"Oh, I don't know, Frank; I am sure he must be nice, he's so fond of Teddy."

"He's worth a million of money, lucky dog!" said her husband, enviously.

The girl at the side of the table looked up at this.

"Oh," she exclaimed, opening her eyes, "and he is really coming here? What fun! And Susan is coming too. Susan will be enchanted. You know she has a mania for queer people."

"Mr. Clay," said the elder lady to her daughter, "is not a *queer* person, he is darling Teddy's great friend."

"Yes," said her daughter, who was apparently scarcely impressed by the maternal display of dignity; "well, what I mean is, everybody's talking about him. And he's—he's—he's an awful republican—or agitator—or *something*, you know."

"He's managed to make a fortune at it anyhow," said her father, grimly. "Now, how the dickens

are we to entertain a swell chap like that, I'd like to know! It's all very well for Master Ted to issue his commands, but——"

The speaker gathered up his letters and went off grumbling. Neither his wife nor daughter appeared disturbed; they both knew perfectly well that Ivor Clay would be invited in due course, and that should Ivor Clay accept the invitation, no one would welcome him more cordially than the master of the house. Whether Ivor Clay would accept the invitation was a question far less easy to answer, in the opinion of the two ladies. For of late years the Lexhams had not been able to entertain persons of prominence. As a matter of fact, it was about as much as they could do to live at Longhaise at all, even with strict economy and an establishment shorn of much of its former state. It did not strike any of them that possibly Ivor Clay might be totally ignorant of either themselves or their circumstances: which comes of being very great people in a very small place. Naturally, your view of the outer world corresponds very much to the view that is obtained by looking through the wrong end of a telescope. Ivor Clay would have been amused had he known of the flutter which the possibility of his visit to them was causing. To him the Lexhams were primarily Teddy Lexham's people; and secondarily, the owners of a place somewhere in Eastshire. Had any person told him that Mr. Lexham was badly off, he would have experienced no sort of surprise, and certainly no sort of regret. The day of the agriculturalist in England is over. The god of political economy cannot, and will not work a miracle, in order that Mr. Lexham of Longhaise, or any other landed proprietor, may escape the logical consequences of his position.

That is what Ivor Clay would have pointed out to you had you chanced to converse with him on the subject. Ivor Clay had arrived in London after an absence, more or less continuous, of fifteen years. He had spent those fifteen years in New

Britain. New Britain, as most people know, is the oldest of England's dependencies outside the confines of Great Britain, and everybody knows it is the most troublesome. That it happened to be particularly troublesome at this especial period, was, many persons were good enough to say, entirely owing to the man who at this moment was walking up Piccadilly in the direction of Hyde Park Corner. Just as he reached the Bachelor's Club, he had to pause for a moment to wait for the traffic to thin sufficiently to allow him to cross the street. Looking at him as he stood there, one would have seen an upright, well-built man, some seven-and-thirty years old, unmistakably an English gentleman. One would also have seen that Poole had made his grey frock coat, and that other artists of equal eminence were responsible for his hat and his boots. The extreme freshness and cleanliness of aspect that had characterised Ivor Clay fifteen years ago were still observable about him. He had gone through much in those years—much both in body and mind—and yet though all that had left its impressions upon him, he was still a young looking man for his age; for Ivor Clay had preserved, in a life of very virile and strenuous effort, that element of boyishness which, successfully retained, keeps a man from ever growing old. His face, which had grown broader since his youth, had also grown harder—that is to say, less fleshy; while the mouth and lips, partly from the stress of life and partly from the action of constant shaving upon the skin, had grown tense and mobile, the upper lip lengthening slightly and closing down upon the lower, which was not thin, but at the same time not sensually thickened. The lines of the mouth were more expressive of thought than formerly, yet the face remained emphatically that of the man of action, whose thoughts deal with actualities, not ideas. With his great square head and the hair, which was still as thick and as flaxen in hue as it had been fifteen years ago, Ivor Clay

was a noticeable man. There dwelt about him in a more marked degree than ever that ineffaceable air of distinction that made people turn and look after him in a crowd. His personality impressed itself instantly upon you. No one who saw Ivor Clay even once ever failed to recognise him again.

He walked on briskly, his face frowning a little, the lines of his mouth set in deep thought. A very definite purpose had brought him to England just now, nothing less in fact than to measure his own strength against the strength of the English Government; and by so doing to guage how far his own strength was able to go, and how far his own prestige and his own power actually existed, apart from the brilliant existence which they owned in the newspaper press of New Britain, and a portion of the press at home.

Since his arrival in London he had had several interviews with the minister who was chiefly responsible for the affairs of New Britain at home, and with other members of her Majesty's Government as well, and he was not yet altogether satisfied with the result of those interviews. He had laid down certain propositions and coolly made certain demands; in return he had been treated with the utmost courtesy—too much of the latter, perhaps, for the very excess of it had awakened his suspicions. One thing, however, was clear to him that day: he must remain on the spot, and watch matters carefully. This being so, he felt he had plenty of time wherein to look up Teddy Lexham's people, and a letter had by that post gone to Mrs. Lexham, accepting her invitation to pay them a visit. Apart from Teddy and from his old friend Henry Tilson, there was nobody in England with whom he cared especially to renew or cultivate acquaintance. In London, indeed, and even in society, he was to a certain extent sought after. He was so large a thorn in the flesh of English governments that of course the English governments were now pathetically anxious to be civil to

him. Society, which is not always amenable to governments other than its own esoteric constitution, had also from a variety of more or less cogent reasons, shown a decided inclination to take him up—an inclination which was no more reciprocated by him than in so far as he found society might be useful to him.

For Ivor Clay had not gone through life and was not the owner of a million of money at thirty-seven years old, every farthing of which he had made by his own head and hand, without being perfectly aware that there are few institutions or persons in life which a man sufficiently strong and sufficiently wise may not subordinate largely to his own use and for the setting forward of his own particular purpose. Added to this, the man in himself possessed a certain adaptability, and a certain versatility that made every side of life more or less interesting to him; and these existing side by side in a nature which also possessed an absolutely iron will, resulted in a type of character as fascinating to most people as it was curiously uncommon. At this moment, for example, nine people out of ten would have taken him merely for a goodly specimen of the man about town common to Clubland and the West End, so entirely were his dress and bearing outwardly conformed to the standards set up by, and for, such men; because, for all his briskness of movement and determined face, the air of leisureliness of a class set at ease—which, no matter what vicissitudes overtake him, still hangs about the man whose early life has been spent at an English public school and an English university—had stamped itself indelibly upon him.

This, in sooth, had, some years earlier, led prophets to prophesy loudly that Ivor Clay would never get a hold upon the affections or the confidence of the people of New Britain; for the people of New Britain hate no human creature with such undying hatred—they *say*, or others say so for them—as the ubiquitous English swell. Never-

theless, the prophets prophesied falsely, for Ivor Clay had got his hold as no man before him had ever got it, both on the hearts and the confidences of the people of New Britain. But all through his life Clay was destined to falsify even the closest calculations of those with whom he had most to do. He had begun by falsifying Mr. Tilson's calculations. The latter had not believed it possible that a man of Ivor Clay's age and habits and mode of life would, or could, for any appreciable length of time, have persisted in his determination to decline the use of three thousand a year. When at length it became clear to Mr. Tilson that Ivor Clay really meant to persist in it, he could only look upon it as the first step in a path that could only lead to ruin of a sort, alas! too common. Yet here his apprehensions were entirely at fault. Again, that any man should go to New Britain and in New Britain make a million of money in less than twenty years, or in all time was in Mr. Tilson's belief a sheer impossibility. All the same, that was what Ivor Clay had done. Lastly, that Ivor Clay would ever think a second time of his magniloquent proposal to pay back the money that had been spent upon him by his father, was equally improbable. But Ivor Clay had paid it back even to the uttermost farthing.

CHAPTER VI.

MOREOVER, it was the hope of falsifying the calculations of many sapient persons that brought Ivor Clay to England just now; yet it had been written by the moving finger of fate that his own calculations were to be set at nought presently, by one person out of the millions of mankind.

The person who was to do this was a woman, and her name was Susan Romer, and her age was four-and-twenty, and her occupation that of a young lady in society, and her place of residence (to follow the approved inquisitorial form of the official document) was with her parents, in a red brick house in a portion of old Chelsea that has not even yet been found of the destroyer—otherwise the house-agent and builder of Belgravia—and still therefore retains some of its particular charm and character.

Susan Romer was sitting in an especial room of this house, on the morning of the day on which Ivor Clay was walking up Piccadilly.

Susan Romer was busily working and talking, the latter possibly with even more assiduity than the former.

"No," she was saying, partly to herself and partly to her companion, a middle-aged lady, who was Susan's mother, and the only other occupant of the room, "no, it is not good."

The elder lady smiled.

"I think it is very nice," she remarked, placidly.

Her whole appearance was indicative of placidity and easy contentment.

Placidity and easy contentment are not charac-

teristic of the present age. No doubt that was why the daughter diametrically differed from the mother in this respect, and others.

"No," repeated the daughter again, "it is *not* good." She held "it" out at arm's length as she spoke, "it" being a small clay bust which she was busily engaged in modelling. She set it on the table in front of her, and with her head on one side scrutinised it critically, giving the wet clay a pinch here and there, but with a growing air of dissatisfaction increasingly visible in face and attitude, even too in the movements of her hand as it moulded the clay rapidly. She stopped suddenly, and leaning her chin upon her upturned palm in an attitude very often employed by her, gazed steadily at her work. It was a small bust of a man's head, and despite the dissatisfaction that the modeller expressed with it, it showed considerable power of expression, and vigour of treatment in the modelling both of the head and features, especially in the ears and the curves of the neck. It was as yet only in the rough, and far from being much more than an outline, but it was not at all bad. That the modeller would ever be a sculptor any artist looking at it might be inclined to doubt; that it was the work of an amateur, no artist could doubt at all; nevertheless, it displayed character, and character in any work is of value, and will cover the multitude of other sins: character in amateur work being rare enough to atone for breaking the whole decalogue of Art in technique.

"I wonder why I do it, why we do it nowadays?"

The speaker, her chin still supported by the palm of her hand, nodded her head to and fro, reflectively.

Her mother knitted the last stitch on the needle, turned the stocking she was knitting, and plunged the needle into a fresh row before she spoke.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said, placidly, "except that it amuses you."

Her daughter frowned.

"That is just what it does *not* do; it does not amuse us—oh dear, no!" As she spoke the frown faded from her face and she sighed, a little short impatient sigh.

"Then don't tire yourself over it," remarked her mother, soothingly.

"It doesn't tire me," was the quick response; "can't you understand?"

"No," returned the elder lady, imperturbably, "I can't. You say it doesn't amuse you, and the next moment you say it doesn't tire you. What am I to understand by that? I am sure I don't know. But I never do know what you young people at the present day are driving at."

"Perhaps we don't know ourselves," said her daughter, with a quick, fleeting smile. She turned away from the table and its modelling apparatus and took a few steps up and down the room. Her movements were quick and decided, yet even in the big linen wrapper that covered her dress and was necessary when working at the clay, her gestures were graceful and distinguished.

Susan Romer was not a very tall woman, nor was she a very slender woman, inclining more towards a decided roundness than slimness of form; nevertheless, she was very graciously graceful, if such an expression be permitted. Her limbs were perfectly proportioned to her height, and her head was particularly well set upon her shoulders. These together with her upright carriage and bearing, did much for her, giving her indeed a suggestion of greater height than she actually possessed, and an easy, rapid gait that yet was saved from being either slouching or undignified. Her face, which was round rather than oval, was noticeable for a wide brow; not high, but expressing more intellectuality than is common to women, even at the present day; while its form at the temples indicated a love of the Arts and a certain power of proficiency in form and colour. Her eyes were

very dark brown, and being shortsighted, she had, as many such persons have, a trick of drooping the lids over the pupils, which, as the eyelashes were long and dark also, gave a peculiar softness and languor not only to the eye itself but to the entire expression of the face. Her mouth was refined but firm, the underlip slightly "sucked in," but the chin was too wide for beauty, though its defect gave character and strength to the rest of the face. She sometimes said of herself that "her profile was passable, her expression tolerable, her front face unendurable." But as a matter of fact, her profile came close to actual beauty, while if the full face disappointed the expectations of the profile, the rapidity and intelligence of its ever-changing expression more than atoned for shortcomings in form and feature. Her complexion was clear, with a faint pink in the cheeks that deepened to rose colour under excitement or emotion. Her hair was very dark and grew prettily, especially so above the lines of the throat and round the ears.

It was impossible to be with Susan Romer and not to become intensely fond of her, or positively dislike her. This is generally the case with persons of pronounced individuality. To do her justice, however, you would find yourself more likely to love than to hate her. Few people hated her, except those who did not succeed in hoodwinking her.

For littleness, meanness, or dishonesty of even the palest shade, Susan Romer had a contempt which she did not scruple to proclaim whenever the possessors of such qualities came in her way. As she was gifted with a very clear and incisive way of expressing herself, dashed with a certain faculty for ironic antithesis, her contempt when translated into words was apt to hurt even proverbially thick-skinned offenders. Should she, however, hurt you undeservedly, her atonement would, you might be quite sure, be as prompt and generous as the most exacting could desire.

She stopped short now a few paces from the little clay bust upon which she was at work, and lifting a pair of pince-nez which dangled from a long gold chain hung round her neck, scrutinised her model steadily for a moment or two through the glasses. Dropping the latter, she came forward and took up the clay again. Holding it in her left hand, she began to speak, declaiming vehemently, with an accompanying series of gestures from her outstretched right hand peculiar to her.

"Now, look here," she exclaimed, addressing the elder lady, who was all the time knitting as steadily and unweariedly as if her daily bread depended upon it, "will you explain this to me?" She paused for a moment, but her mother did not so much as lift her eyes from the knitting. She would have told you that Susan was always asking questions, generally more or less inconvenient, invariably difficult if not impossible to answer. Mrs. Romer had long since made up her mind that the simplest plan to pursue was not to answer them. She had pursued this plan for upwards of twenty years—since Susan could speak, in fact—and with considerable success, except indeed when Susan now and then cornered her, and being merciless, would not let her go till she had elicited some sort of answer from her.

In the momentary silence which followed Susan repeated her question. Adding to it as well:

"Will you tell me this? Why am I unable to do what nevertheless ought not to be beyond the power of any average person who has had such teaching as I have?" She brought her hand back against the bust. "I'll tell you what," she said, vehemently, "I wish I'd never been born a lady!"

"My dear," murmured her mother, as if she considered remonstrance incumbent upon her, rather than at all useful where Susan was concerned.

"Yes, I do!" returned the latter. "No lady has ever been a sculptor, no lady has ever been an

artist, no lady has ever been *anything* worth her salt."

She laughed. Mrs. Romer still continued to knit in silence and placidity.

Susan's face changed.

"Why don't you tell me I'm talking nonsense?" she said smilingly, to her mother.

"My darling," said the latter, "I scarcely thought it necessary"—and she went on knitting.

Her daughter laughed with genuine heartiness. She always took a joke against herself in good part.

"Yes," she resumed, "I am. But can't you tell me why it is we *want* to do anything nowadays? After all it's odd, isn't it? You didn't want to do anything. I mean you girls of the sixties. I suppose it's a new development; I wish I had come too early or too late for it." She looked again at her own work and a little sigh parted her lips and stirred the gold chain on her breast. "I have had every advantage of education that the resources of the present day can give a woman," she resumed, gravely. "I have worked hard; *that* I can't help, it is part of the new blessing or the new curse, whichever you please, that has fallen on women, the wish to work hard; well, I have worked hard, and the result"—she let her hand fall despairingly alongside the "squeeze" of wet clay—"is *that!* And what is that after all?"

"I think it is very nice indeed," interposed her mother gallantly, with an air of brave cheerfulness such as a small child might display who was trying to put out a big fire with the contents of a doll's water-pail. "I think it is very nice, very good, such a capital likeness. I am sure George will be delighted with it."

Susan's eyebrows drew themselves together quickly.

"George?" she exclaimed; "oh yes, I dare say he will, but then that doesn't count. One doesn't, if one's an artist, give much for the opinion of those

who care for one; it's the opinion—the good opinion—of those who *don't* we want to capture. Besides, I think it's partly George's fault that it isn't better." She paused and stared gravely and scrutinisingly at the clay face at which she was working. "He is a good fellow," she resumed, apostrophising the model and the absent original of the model, "but—— I don't know," she continued, irresolutely, "there's something wanting, and if he had it, his face would be an easier one to model effectively." She passed her fingers along the features of the face under her hand; they were small, delicate features of an aquiline type, the mouth shaded by a thin, carefully cultivated moustache, the head, small also, being shapely, but narrow. "I think," pursued the speaker, reflectively, "that the peerage is apt to have a very *deadening* effect. Of course a title is a pretty ornament; the bigger the title the prettier it is, but it spoils the man—as a man."

Her mother laughed.

"You won't get many people to agree with you, my dear," she interposed, drily.

"People," retorted her daughter, finely, "people are so many dumb driven cattle."

"It seems to me," commented the mother imperturbably, "that people find a good deal to say just at present."

Susan Romer laughed with keen relish. But she made no attempt to dispute the matter.

"George," she said, returning to the subject in hand, "would be twice the man he is if he could only *do* something."

"My dear Susan," said her mother, "I must say I think he does everything that his position requires of him."

"That's just it, mother, but his position only requires of him so very little after all."

"What do you want him to do?" said the elder lady, reprovingly.

Susan raised her eyebrows.

"Goodness knows!" she replied, coolly. She let her glasses drop from her eyes, and half lowered the lids after that fashion of hers. "Poor dear," she said, laughingly, "he *is* so very restricted, you see. Oh, it is a dreadful thing," she repeated, with increasing vehemence, "to be born with everything in the world that you want to have! No, mother, I wouldn't be a man on those terms. What makes it worth while to be a man is to have nothing, and to want everything and to get what you want."

Her mother went on knitting; she had heard this, or something very like it, more than once. Her plan was always to let Susan talk it all out. "It does her good to say it," she reflected, "and it does me no harm to hear it."

Susan, however, was off now on another tack. That was Susan's way. It saved her from being a bore at all events.

"I wish," she said, with immovable gravity, "that George would do something violent, just for once. I'll tell you why," she added, confidentially, "it would put such a lot of expression into his face, and I'd make a model, in that case, which would be worth looking at. And, after all, it's quite easy to do something violent nowadays. You have only to stand on a chair in the Park and shout for ten minutes, and you'll get half a column all to yourself in the papers next day, headed, 'Violent Conduct in Hyde Park: Extraordinary Scene." She smacked her hands together sharply. "I have it!" she cried, triumphantly; "I see it, in my mind's eye, Horatio! George standing on a chair beside the statue of Achilles, and talking at the top of his voice."

"My dear Susan," said her bewildered mother, "what do you mean?"

"It would be splendid," pursued her daughter, unheedingly. "I shouldn't mind being there to hold a carafe of water and a tumbler for him. Suppose he wore his coronet round his tall hat, as *Punch* invariably arranges it, it would be a very fine effect.

It would give the House of Lords a new lease of life—and beat a coster's cart to fits. Fancy a peer with such spunk as to go on the stump."

"My darling child," her mother ventured to observe, with mild emphasis, "I do think your mode of expressing yourself is slightly vulgar——"

"All right, mother, so much the better; it's the only way we have now of distinguishing ourselves from the middle-class people, who have all grown so painfully polished."

Mrs. Romer cleared her throat with a curious significant emphasis.

"What's the matter?" said her daughter, looking at her.

"Oh, nothing," said her mother, mildly, "except that you radicals, as you say you are, do puzzle me."

Susan threw back her head.

"Mother," she said, laughingly, "you've scored. I own it, for once."

But Mrs. Romer was counting the stitches in her knitting, which was the kind of scoring she understood best.

Her daughter meantime had gone off at a tangent on a perfectly fresh line of reflection.

"It was a wonderful world," she observed presently, and it was evident that the observation was the tail end of a certain train of thought that had gone on rapidly in her mind.

"What was a wonderful world?" enquired her mother, whose stitches were finally reckoned for the present.

"The world you lived in when you were a girl," replied her daughter, musingly.

"It was a very pleasant world," said the elder lady, stoutly. "We didn't trouble our heads, I can assure you, with the problems you girls nowadays wear yourselves out trying to solve."

"No," said the girl thus addressed, "you didn't trouble yourselves about much—except men," she added, with calm impertinence.

Mrs. Romer smiled composedly.

"The men, at any rate, troubled themselves a good deal about us," she remarked, placidly.

"I don't in the least know how you managed it," continued her daughter, seriously, "but it can't be done nowadays, you see there aren't enough men, to begin with; and then, men don't admire us at present as they did in your days."

"No, upon my word they don't!" said her mother, with an accent on the words that indicated a good deal of gratification in uttering them.

"Because we don't want them to, simply, that's all," pursued her daughter.

Mrs. Romer said nothing; she contented herself with a faint, incredulous sniff.

Susan Romer sat down in a big wicker chair close at hand. Her eyes still strayed towards the "squeeze" of wet clay a few paces off. She sighed, a quick short sigh.

Her mother looked at her.

"When I was a girl," the latter said quietly, after a momentary pause, "if a man asked us to marry him, and if we said we would marry him, why, we did."

Her daughter frowned.

"I'll marry George Sithrington," she said, slowly. "I have said I will, and I will—if he cares to wait."

"My dear," protested her mother, "George is a gentleman, and no gentleman——"

"—Is a jilt. I agree with you, mother. That still remains out of the old code. But I should like to see a new code for women. I should like to see the woman who jilts a man meted out precisely the same measure as the man who jilts a woman."

"Ah," exclaimed her mother, deprecatingly, "you know a lady is privileged to change her mind."

Susan Romer sat up in her chair. "Yes," she said, and her eyes sparkled; "yes, certainly, in accordance with that old code which made so much of woman that honour was denied to her. I

want a new code, which shall include among a few other trifling items, a sense of honour. One hears so much about an equal standard for the sexes. I am quite willing to admit the advantages of an equal standard, but why doesn't some one ask for an equal code of honour. The man calling himself a gentleman, who jilts a lady, is pretty nearly cut by his friends. Why isn't the woman calling herself a lady treated in precisely the same way?"

Mrs. Romer said nothing, and for the best of reasons—nothing occurred to her to say.

An odd, humorous smile curled round Susan's lips.

"The vision of George," she exclaimed, lying back in her chair once more, "is too delicious. George talking nonsense! George shouting, yelling nonsense at the top of his voice! He has a nice voice. It's one of the best things about him. Think of it for a moment—not George's voice but George's entry into public life. That's what his Aunt Honoria is always waiting for. Upon my word, you could hardly have anything more public than a chair in the Park. He might persevere until he had become a familiar figure in London life. Who is it that talks of familiar figures in London life? Well, never mind. If he would only consent to get locked up by the police once or twice, it would add immensely to his reputation. Think of the paragraphs in the newspaper: 'Lord Sithrington Again,' 'The Earl of Sithrington at Bow Street,' 'A Peer on the Prowl,' or some such headings."

"I can't conceive," said the elder lady, stolidly, "why you are always laughing at George."

"My dear mother, I assure you I very seldom laugh at George. I may truly say he's not a laughing matter—to me, at any rate."

Her mother raised her eyes for once from the inevitable knitting.

"You are a very fortunate girl, Susan," she said, seriously, "I wonder if you realise how fortunate."

Susan yawned smartly.

"Oh, yes, I do. That's why I'm going to marry George; at least that, and the pleasure of having a coronet on my pocket-handkerchiefs. There's a great moral support in a coronet on your pocket-handkerchiefs. When in doubt, play coronets. Even prime ministers do that sometimes." The speaker paused, yawned again, and resumed as usual on a fresh tack. "Every woman ought to be married!" She laid down the statement with extreme emphasis.

"I am glad to hear you say so," remarked the woman who was married.

The woman who was not married yet, eyed her mother with a flicker of mischief in her dark eyes.

"So I am going to marry the only man who ever did me the honour to ask me," she said, wickedly.

"My dear," cried her mother, all in a flutter at once, "I shouldn't say things like that if I were you."

Susan opened her eyes widely with well-feigned amazement.

"But it's true," she remarked, with equally well-feigned artlessness.

Mrs. Romer knitted a little quickly.

"So many things are true," she returned, solemnly, "which at the same time one never says."

"Then you wouldn't have said it to father, for instance?" asked her daughter, nonchalantly.

Mrs. Romer bridled up stiffly.

"Indeed, my dear," she said, with quick, tremulous haste, "I had a great many admirers, a great many"—and she actually grew pink.

"How nice!" said Susan, languidly. "What a responsibility, having so wide a choice, as the advertisements say! yes, it was a wonderful world! I was reading a novel of Trollope's the other day, and it seems that every girl in those days of peace and plenty had—not two strings to her bow, but

at least three or more beaux to her string. Don't laugh, mother, it is a poor joke, I admit it. And it seems to me too that it was all done with woolwork, two dozen singing lessons, and screaming on one note if you saw a mouse. No, I can't say that Trollope's novels have raised my opinion of men. On the contrary, I think men have improved—distinctly improved. Oh dear, yes; you wouldn't get the poorest creature in the way of a man nowadays to be imposed upon by two dozen singing lessons, or the fear of a rat—mouse I mean."

Mrs. Romer shook her head.

"I never know what you are driving at," she said, with a sort of placid despair, "but you were always an odd child—like your father."

Her daughter turned her head in the direction of the door, the handle of which some one was turning at that moment.

"Father," said the girl, addressing a middle-aged gentleman who an instant later entered the room, "mother says you are an odd child."

The middle-aged gentleman stared at his daughter, but made no response to her remark. It was doubtful if it had conveyed any meaning to his ears, as it was evident that his thoughts were otherwise engrossed at that moment.

Mr. Romer was an enthusiastic archæologist, and a member of numerous erudite associations dealing with archæology and kindred subjects. He wore spectacles, and his grey hair was badly cut, besides being generally untidy. It was standing up straight now, and it stood up straighter still as he sat down opposite Susan's model and pushed his fingers up through the hair over his ears.

"That rubbing," he said, fixing his eyes vacantly on the bust of his prospective son-in-law, "has led to a most interesting discovery. I have incontestably proved by means of it that the Soper-Scorebys of Lincolnshire are connected with the West Riding branch."

"Who in the world," said Mrs. Romer to her daughter, "are the Soper-Scorebys?"

"I haven't the most remote idea," replied the latter, "but it's not a pretty name. Um—ah—Sithrington's prettier than that anyhow. Think, mother, if I had wanted to marry a Soper-Scoreby, or if a Soper-Scoreby had been the one man who had ever wanted to marry me. Oh, don't look so incredulous! I suppose they *have* married, like all the rest of the world, and it might just as well have been me. Really, I am obliged to George—and Providence—that I shall not have to be Mrs. Soper-Scoreby. Lady Sithrington *does* sound ever so much nicer. Father, I hope you appreciate the fact that when I'm Lady Sithrington I shall go in to dinner *miles* before you."

"Certainly," said her father gravely, and he folded his fingers together with much exactitude. "The wife of an Earl of the United Kingdom—Sithrington's earldom dates 1837; a coronation advancement, the barony being a Jacobite creation—the wife of an Earl of the United Kingdom is entitled in the order of precedence as laid down by her present Majesty the Queen, to rank next after and immediately before——oh, dear me!" The speaker broke off his words with extraordinary abruptness, and glanced round him as if he had only then for the first time grasped exactly his own whereabouts. "Dear, dear me, how damp this room is! I had no idea we were in the studio. I've been looking for you both all over the house, to tell you about the Soper-Scoreby rubbing. I'll read a paper on it at the 'Wandering Antiquaries' in October—yes, I certainly shall. No, no"—the speaker waved his daughter's remonstrance aside—"if you have so little regard for your future health as to remain immured in a room permeated with clay-damp, I have more regard for mine, I assure you."

He was gone before either his wife or his daughter could get in a word.

"It *is* very damp here," remarked Mrs. Romer, who, now that the idea had been presented to her, shivered quite determinately. Her daughter smiled. "I am sure I can't think why you spend so much time at such an unhealthy pursuit."

Her daughter smiled again. Her parents' remonstrances on this subject were one of the amusements of her life—naturally so, when she remembered that amongst other trifling sums cheerfully expended by them on their only child, they had built this studio for her at a cost of something like two hundred pounds.

It was a very charming studio, within and without. It looked out upon a garden—for the house had a garden, a real garden, one that had old fruit trees in it, and green lawns, and a "wilderness"; the last-named so cunningly devised that for all you could tell by looking at it, it might have covered an acre or two instead of something over half a perch; and these, with a glimpse of the river through a group of limes of quite respectable size, were what you saw from the window of Susan's studio. From that point of vantage you might indeed very well imagine yourself fifty miles away from town, buried in the fragrant depths of a Kent or Surrey garden.

Susan Romer's eyes were very fond of this view, and never more so than as it was just now—with the young green still upon the trees; with the laburnums bending gracefully beneath the weight of their golden glory; with the dawning flush of summer rising over it all.

She went over to the long window which opened on to a flight of steps leading into the garden, and stood looking out.

Her mother's last words were still sounding in her ears.

"I can't think why you spend so much time on such a pursuit."

At that moment Susan herself could have scarcely told why she did it. Her face, as she

very unbecomingly flattened her nose against the window glass, expressed much of that curious unrest that so many young faces display nowadays. She was wondering, as she had often wondered before, whether after all there is any adequate satfaction in the mere fact of work for work's sake; whether her mother's part and the part of the women of that generation had not been the better part. She became all at once convinced that it was the better part. Nevertheless, she knew that she could no more herself adopt it than that she could alter her own age and transform herself into a woman of that generation.

In another moment she was taking off her big holland overall, and her face looked clear and as composed as usual.

"Mother," she began, unaware that her mother had already followed in the wake of her father.

She smiled when she made the discovery. "I wonder," she said to herself, as she washed her hands, "if I shall ever come to see everything through George's eyes and to form opinions exactly as George puts them before me—and yet"—she grinned—"mother had 'plenty of admirers.' Oh dear, what a funny world it must have been, to be sure!"

CHAPTER VII.

IVOR CLAY'S visit to the Lexhams took place in due course. As a matter of fact he was invited for the Whitsuntide recess, it being in the mind of both Mr. and Mrs. Lexham that such, taking the time of year into consideration, was the proper thing to do.

Time was when the Whitsuntide party at Longhaise had been an affair of some size and some importance. That time, however, was not now, and the present party, outside the host and hostess and the one daughter left at home, consisted simply of Ivor Clay and Susan Romer. The latter had elected to go to the Lexhams for no other apparant reason than that their invitation was probably the dullest, certainly the most insignificant of many similar ones that she had received. She alleged, however, that she wanted a complete rest, and added truly that such is not to be found in the smart precincts of a Whitsuntide party in a smart country house. She did not think it necessary to mention the fact of a promise to Molly Lexham whereby she had pledged herself to the visit in question.

Her silence as to that, and the resolution with which she fulfilled the promise, were eminently characteristic.

Thus it arose that as Susan and her hostess and Molly sat at tea in the verandah—which was not a verandah at all, but a glass-covered passage running along the west side of the house—the three were experiencing the sort of thrill of anticipation which heralds the near approach of some one, of

whom you have heard a good deal, but whom you have never yet beheld.

"I give him to you, Susan," Molly Lexham was saying. For Molly was a young lady whose spirits were higher than her intelligence. Susan made no rejoinder. She was thinking that Molly was deplorably provincial in certain subtle niceties of deportment, and regretting the decadence of the Lexham fortunes which was responsible for Molly's short-comings. A similar realisation may have passed through Mrs. Lexham's mind at the same moment, for she frowned at her daughter as she said:

"My dear Molly, do pray be careful. I hear steps on the terrace."

The words were scarcely uttered when two gentlemen appeared on the terrace beneath at the foot of the flight of stone steps leading up to the verandah. The foremost gentleman was Mr. Lexham, he who followed was Ivor Clay.

Mrs. Lexham put down her teacup, stood up, and walked forward to the door.

"We knew we should find you all here," said her husband, "so we left the waggonette at the hall door, and I brought Mr. Clay round by the terrace instead of through the house. He would like a cup of tea, I am sure."

Mr. Lexham paused at the head of the steps to let Ivor Clay accept his hostess's outstretched hand and precede him into the verandah. As Ivor Clay entered he caught sight of the two young ladies, to whom he was forthwith introduced. The two young ladies were not long in taking stock of him. Susan Romer found herself thinking that a well cut suit of blue serge is a very becoming costume to a well-made, gentlemanly man.

As to Molly Lexham, now that the great man was actually here, she was as completely silent, and as much at a loss for something to say, as she had a few minutes before been volubly at her ease.

A moment or two later Susan found herself admiring the pleasant ease with which Ivor Clay made himself at home with them all in a very few minutes.

She watched him very closely, although, unlike her friend Molly, she did not betray her scrutiny by a relapse into stolid silence. But whether she spoke or listened she found herself irresistibly impelled to bestow her whole attention on this man.

Her previous experience had not prepared her for a personality such as Ivor Clay's. She said to herself afterwards that no experience you could have in this world, which should exclude the existence of Ivor Clay, could in any way prepare you for his acquaintance, because he was not like any other person in the world except himself. But this was afterwards. At the present moment she was content to admire the admirable manner in which he devoted himself to his hostess at once, without at the same time seeming to ignore the existence of the others, and the equally dexterous way in which he presently turned the conversation to that which was at once of the closest interest to his host and hostess, as well as his own credential to their acquaintance.

In response to some polite enquiries as to his trains and his journey—not a very long one—from town, he added:

"I seem to know the line from London to Longhaise like an old friend, for Teddy has spoken to me so often about it. In fact, I know it nearly as well as Teddy himself."

His host grinned.

"And that," observed the latter, "is saying a good deal. The scamp knew the line far too well. He lived on the railway when he didn't live in town. He gave Longhaise precious little of his valuable company."

Mrs. Lexham interposed here.

"Indeed," she said, in part answering her husband and in part addressing her guest, "I think

Teddy was here quite as much as you could expect any young man of his age to be. I am sure he loved every stick and stone in the place."

Ivor Clay raised his eyes to his hostess's face.

"That," he said, with his quick pleasant smile, "I can thoroughly endorse. Your son loves this place as"—he paused perceptibly and then concluded—"I should imagine a man can only love his home and the home of his fathers."

Susan Romer glanced quickly at the speaker as he uttered the words. They were not such as her previous knowledge of his character and his career would have led her to expect from him. But, as has already been said, Ivor Clay frequently falsified the expectations of those who knew him by repute, no less than of those who knew him personally.

Teddy's father laughed and shook his head, but with a warm note of indulgence in the laughter, and a smile at Clay that was by no means less friendly than it had been before this speech; but he said nothing, and contented himself with laughing and handing Ivor a plate of hot buttered toast.

Mrs. Lexham lay back a little in her chair and contemplated Teddy's distinguished friend with a face that beamed.

"You are quite right," she said, addressing the latter; "very few people know Teddy as I"—she hesitated and smiled—"as *you* and I know him. He has a great deal of feeling——no, Frank, you needn't laugh like that, Mr. Clay quite understands what I mean."

"I think I do," said Ivor Clay, kindly.

"I am sure you do," said his hostess, emphatically. "No words of mine could describe the state of the dear fellow's feelings when he found he had lost his last chance for the Service."

"Humph!" growled her husband; "then why didn't he put the screw on and do a little work? He failed utterly," he said, turning to Ivor Clay, "Sandhurst and Militia."

Ivor Clay smiled composedly.

"I dare say," he said quietly, and his tone conveyed a very complete knowledge of his subject; yet there was no sarcasm in it, nothing but pure kindliness; "I dare say, but he'll do much better where he is."

"Well, I hope so; you're very kind to say it," returned Teddy's father, somewhat mollified, "but he never did well here in his whole life."

"He did one thing supremely well, I assure you," said a voice at Ivor Clay's elbow, a clear voice that had that certain quality of distinction in it that more than anything else captivates the ear. Ivor Clay's ear was quickly captivated now, so much so that he turned his head and saw that the voice proceeded from the young lady, with the dark short-sighted eyes, to whom he had a moment before been introduced.

"And what was that?" said Clay, involuntarily addressing her, although her remark had been actually intended for their host.

She gave him a quick passing smile that had a faint touch of humour lingering underneath its careless surface.

"He dressed to perfection." In spite of her smile, her words were spoken with the most perfect seriousness.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Lexham.

"I remember," pursued Susan Romer evenly, her eyes still addressing Ivor Clay, "staying with Teddy once for a week during one of the big shoots the Cliffords have at Clifford Royal, and Sir Albert Heatherdyke—the artist, you know—was there too. He said he had never seen anything of its kind more absolutely artistic than the way in which Teddy suited his clothes to every occasion. He said his wardrobe was something to dream of."

"'Pon my soul," said Mr. Lexham, "he'd have dreamt of it if he'd been Teddy's father, I can tell him, when the bills came in!"

The dark short-sighted eyes met Ivor Clay's again with a faint sparkle in their depths that grew

into an actual gleam of fun as Clay's keen blue ones returned her glance of humour with interest.

"But everything must be paid for—unfortunately," protested Susan, plaintively, "why dwell upon the sordid side?"

Ivor Clay set down his teacup on the silver tray beside him.

"I fear," he said, lightly, "that I sympathise with Miss Romer." He glanced as he said it towards the owner of that name, and then upwards, with a bright smile that showed his strong white teeth pleasantly, to his host, who was leaning against the open doorway. "I sympathise with Miss Romer"—and Susan wondered at the rapidity with which he had at once mastered her name, for she did not know yet that Ivor Clay had an almost royal facility for names and faces. "I often think it's such a pity," he went on, with a humorous gravity equal to Susan's, "that the art of dressing is not placed upon a certain definite footing. Good dressing ought to be a profession—a profession in which men and women"—he waved his hand flatteringly—"women, of course, could attain eminence; or win a respectable competence; or, at the lowest, earn their daily bread. Few people can do more than one thing well; most people are thankful, or ought to be thankful, if they can do even one thing well; and where a talent exists, it seems to be such a waste of opportunity not to afford it the means of due exercise. Instead of asking a man like Teddy to pay for his clothes, the world should pay him for wearing them, for being so very good as to set an example of how they ought to be worn."

Mr. Lexham laughed indulgently.

"That's a very original idea," he said, with the deference due to a man who is very distinguished, and who is at the same time prettily devoting himself to the amusement of others, "very original, 'pon my soul."

"I am afraid," said Ivor Clay, "that I cannot claim your compliment, sir, for my propositions

are merely the expansion of a topic suggested by the infinitely superior meditations of Professor Teufelsdröch." His eyes again met Susan Romer's, and they told him that whatever the allusion conveyed to his host—apparently it did not convey anything at all—Miss Romer at any rate knew her Carlyle well.

"The 'Philosophy of Clothes,'" she murmured, with a little flash of the eyes.

"Precisely," he returned, and his eyes met the little flash of hers with a return humour that was entirely sympathetic; "and I go further than Teufelsdröch," he continued, laughingly, "for I think the philosopher of clothes is a benefactor to the entire human race. The best dressed man of his day"—again his eyes sought those of the young lady on his right—"ought to have the greatest career possible. Why, he ought to end—in—in the House of Lords!"

"Yes," said Susan, quickly; "to set an example."

Ivor Clay threw back his head and laughed outright. The rest of the company, however slight their acquaintance with Herr Teufelsdröch—who in truth is not particularly well known in English country houses—were on the other hand far too well acquainted (and very properly so) with the House of Lords, not to relish the drift of Miss Susan Romer's last remark.

But amid the general chorus of amusement, Ivor Clay was conscious that between himself and the young lady, whose dark eyes with the drooping lids seemed to him to be capable of considerable variety of expression, there had been set up a certain magnetic chain of sympathy, of which the other members of the party remained in total ignorance. This thought, which flashed lightning-like across Ivor Clay's mind, to return later on with clearer and more prolonged force, was a singularly pleasant one, considering that half an hour previously he had been unaware of her existence. But half an hour previously woman, to Ivor

Clay, had been women in general; with the passing of those thirty minutes of accredited time, woman had become, for him, one woman in particular.

A rapid development certainly. Yet in less time a living human being can be born into this world, an entire created organism slip into organic visible relations with the visible organic world. Why, then, should not a spiritual birth, a birth of the ideal into the real, the ever new genesis of soul and heart, be equally ready to spring at the duly ripened moment into a thing of life and vigour?

There is no reason why it should not be so, or—it is less philosophical no doubt, but it is a well attested fact, which perhaps is best of all—that a young man may not within the space of thirty minutes' time, ay, or half thirty minutes' time, become exceedingly sensible of the fact that a young woman of considerable personal attractions is by no means devoid of attractiveness so far as he personally is concerned. Unconsciously, perhaps, Clay had got so far even before the party in the verandah broke up to dress for dinner.

But as he sat in his room at the close of the evening which followed, he was very conscious, very much alive indeed to the fact that a certain apprehension, totally unlooked for, had fastened itself unpleasantly upon him.

It was characteristic of him that it was not until he had thoroughly conquered a piece of work which he had brought with him to do—namely, the drafting of certain facts, known only to himself and destined to be submitted a little later on to the consideration of the minister in whose charge the affairs of New Britain rested—that he permitted even one fugitive thought to stray from the work in hand to anything else in the world, even his own feelings. But when he had locked his despatch box and left the study that adjoined and opened into his bedroom and had been specially prepared for him, he withdrew his mind as completely from the affairs of New Britain and the interests of his

own career, as though neither the one nor the other existed, and allowed his thoughts to wander in a totally different direction. It is not every man who can do this. But then it is not every man who is born with an inflexible will, and a nervous system in perfect working order.

The apprehension which his thoughts carried to him now came borne on the floating perfume of a woman's dark hair, with the echo in the stillness of the night of a woman's clear voice.

Briefly, it occurred to Ivor Clay that Miss Susan Romer had shown a very unmistakable interest, and openly displayed much warmth in the defence of Teddy Lexham. Now Teddy Lexham, as Ivor Clay was well aware, was a young man of parts, as they used to say long ago; and young women, Ivor Clay held in common with most men, are singularly susceptible to the young man of parts. Clay was not a vain man. As a matter of fact, to contemplate himself from a woman's point of view, had not hitherto occurred to him, yet he was persuaded that not even his most partial friend could represent him as a man of parts. His chances, therefore, he concluded, against Teddy Lexham, were poor indeed; wherefore it will be seen how clear and comprehensive was Ivor Clay's knowledge of women. It will also be seen, that as exactly six hours by the clock had gone by since his arrival at Longhaise, a good deal may be done in six hours.

It was certainly a longish step—in six hours from woman in general to your chances with one woman in particular. Nothing in truth but a very long step could have been answerable for the fact that Ivor Clay stood in front of the looking-glass on his dressing-table for at least three minutes, staring at the image of himself therein.

"I always had an ugly mug," he reflected, ruefully; for there are times when even a man who has made a million of money, would give a very

appreciable slice off the million to effect an alteration—for the better—in his own features.

It was almost a pity that the limitations of Nature's laws forbade Ivor Clay from learning that the square jaw, with which he found so much fault, had found no small favour in the eyes of one young lady, who was slumbering peacefully not a hundred miles away.

"Poole ought to know what he's about," said Ivor to himself, as he got into bed, "and he has certainly made me some nice clothes." He sat up in bed as he reflected upon the undeniable claims of Poole to superiority, and settled with himself as to with which selection of the nice clothes he would on the following morning array himself. He concluded satisfactorily at length, that if the morning were warm and sunny, as the previous day seemed to promise, he would appear before the *exigeante* gaze of Miss Susan Romer in a suit of very pale grey, a bluish, delicate slate-grey flannel, with a loose double-breasted coat and pockets on the outside, which the great artificer of fashionable male attire had assured him was highly favoured by gentlemen of taste at that moment; while if the morning should prove cloudy and threatening, he had a darker tweed of a somewhat heather-mixture, more suitable to colder weather. "I came down in blue serge," he concluded, seriously, "that won't do again so soon."

The plan of his forthcoming morning toilet satisfactorily arranged, he blew out his candle and fell asleep.

But as the darkness encompassed him, and the mists of slumber fell down softly over him, there arose in his ear a whispering murmur of words.

"Susan Romer, Susan, Susan," the murmur repeated itself, until it attained even a rhythmical repetition. "Susan Romer—Su-san."

He was conscious of a sweet melody in the rhythmical cadence. Whispers, more or less audible, carried it again and again to his half slumber-

ing brain. How sweet it was in sound! fresh, candid, sensible! A true woman's name. As unlike the fantastic, foolish feebleness of so many fashionable modern names as possible. A name to trust. A name to love: Susan . . . S-u-san . . . He fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE postal authorities at Longhaise had never known their energies or the resources of their office taxed to such an extent as during the only visit that Ivor Clay ever paid in that district. Although it was the time of the Whitsuntide recess, and the time, therefore, it goes without saying, for making holiday on the part of most public servants, yet Mr. Ivor Clay's correspondence was of dimensions calculated to make them open their eyes. Letters, telegrams, postal communications of every sort, not only from London and New Britain, but apparently from every corner of the Empire, seemed to descend as in a great flood during that week on the little obscure Eastshire village. The local telegraph wire had never during the whole course of its existence vibrated so often, or been charged with messages likely in all probability to affect such masses of the Queen's subjects as during those comparatively few days. Mr. Lexham, who, in common with most country gentlemen, was pleased to regard himself as a very busy man, but whose business was after all mostly of that order which has been trenchantly described as merely "an unquiet way of doing nothing," was fairly provoked into openly expressing his wonder how any human being could attend to the requirements of such a correspondnce, and at the same time prove himself, as Ivor Clay did, a pleasant guest and an equally pleasant companion to his fellow-creatures in the same house for the greater part of each day —a view of the matter which amused Ivor quite as much as it astonished his host.

Susan Romer felt as if she had suddenly been thrust into the midst of a great movement, and no experience that could have been given to her would have pleased her more. All her life long Susan Romer had had a great hankering after a side of life that hitherto had been denied to her. With super-abundant energy, a very considerable gift of imagination, and a disposition at once sympathetic and ambitious, she had longed passionately for some share in those larger interests of life and the destinies of life's children than it seemed possible for her as a woman, and an English lady moreover, having a certain assured position, to obtain. Now, for the first time in her life, it seemed to her that she was at last very close to the heart-throbs of a living organisation; or rather, perhaps, permitted to view from a special point of vantage, the wheels and revolutions of a great piece of mechanism, doing its work under the guiding hands of a few men, of whom the chief was at her side, ready to point out to her the various meanings and ultimate destiny of every movement of the machinery.

Life to Susan Romer had suddenly expanded itself, had opened up to her a wide vista of fascinating possibilities; while the dominating influence of a mind and an ambition closely sympathetic to her own, gave the finishing touch of personal interest which a woman invariably needs, to vitalise public life and public movements in her sympathies. She was scarcely aware of it, perhaps, for such women as Susan as a rule are neither aware of it, nor willing to admit it; but the element of personal interest which her acquaintance and intercourse with Clay was every day intensifying, was at least as responsible for the sudden expansion of all her habits of thought, as the latent desire already existent in her mind.

As to Ivor Clay, it seemed to him that that curious magnetic chain of sympathy, which from the very first seemed to have been set up between

Susan Romer and himself, had never since been withdrawn, but rather that every detail of their acquaintance was destined to strengthen its several links. It seemed to him that ere the lapse of only a few days, he and Susan dwelt apart from all others, within a certain ring of intimacy and unanimity of feelings and tastes, into which none of the others for an instant penetrated; of the very existence of which they remained quite blandly unaware. For the first time in his life he enjoyed the rare delight of opening his mind to an auditor at once sympathetic in the best sense of the feminine rendering of the word, and intelligently robust enough, also in the best sense of the feminine rendering of the term, to grasp his meaning and to convey to him the aid and the sympathy which every man of truly distinguished intelligence and of the best type of manhood is delighted to receive from a woman. He spoke to Susan of many things which his good taste and his good sense equally warned him would be dangerous, as well as futile, to speak of openly in an English country house; and he paid her the compliment, the most sweetly subtle that a woman of intelligence and heart can be offered by a distinguished man, of allowing her to share the interests and aims of his life and his career before the eyes of men. She understood, soon enough, that others were only permitted to see this man from the outer vantage of his public life; but that she was admitted to see the man himself, the brain and heart, the moving springs of intellect and feeling that were responsible for the outer life of action. Few women, except of the most inferior type, or intellectually incapable of understanding the tribute offered to them, but would have experienced, as Susan did, the thrill of a new and delicious sense of her own importance, no less than the exquisite gratification of being singled out for special honour, by a man who added to his inherent betrayal of fine manhood the *kudos* of a very prominent position in the world's affairs.

But if Ivor Clay singled out this one woman thus, he by no means allowed any neglect of his duties to his other friends to appear in his conduct or demeanour. On the contrary, the old Jacobean walls at Longhaise had probably never sheltered a guest within them, (and they had sheltered a good many distinguished guests in their day, from royalty down—and up), who took greater pains to return the hospitality extended to him, by doing all in his power to make himself thoroughly pleasant to those who offered it. And he knew how to do this perfectly well. As Teddy Lexham had said of him, he was far too cosmopolitan to obtrude his public or private opinions upon a hostile audience in the intercourse of social life, while he was perfectly free from that acrid acerbity that refuses to recognise a social friend in a political opponent. Whatever Ivor Clay might be in public life, however men opposed to him might differ as to his merits and demerits, there was no doubt at all among those who knew the man in the ordinary intercourse of private life, that he was a singularly pleasant, genial companion.

Ivor Clay was fortunate in the possession of one trifling attribute not always vouchsafed to men destined to make their mark—an admirable gift of small-talk.

There are very few better gifts wherewith you can be equipped for a country house party. Neither are there many which, in the initial stages of acquaintance, will go further towards ripening acquaintance into a friendship. When a man who has shown other men what he can do in the world, as Ivor Clay had shown it, possesses this, it increases the respect of his fellows, as well as their somewhat awesome admiration for his versatility, while it is a very powerful weapon in his own armoury for the furtherance of his especial aims. Mr. Lexham—who would have despised a man whose sole accomplishment, or even whose chief accomplishment, was nothing more than the desire

and the ability to make himself agreeable in society —was profoundly impressed by the very same accomplishment, when it was displayed and exercised by such a man as his present guest.

Altogether Ivor Clay wanted to make a favourable impression upon those about him—and he succeeded. There were very few occasions in his life in which he wanted to do this and did not succeed. It was one of the secrets of his other successes in life, this power of his to attract people and to attach them to himself. It is a rare gift, and the reason of its rarity is tolerably obvious: simply that every man cannot be a leader of men, for it is a marked attribute as a rule of the leaders of men. Among such, therefore, as are born to follow, it is not common because Nature is never prodigal of her gifts. For good or evil the gift was Clay's. Susan Romer felt it almost from the first moment of their acquaintance. She was shrewd and she was clear-headed, and it should have warned her, her circumstances being what they were. Nevertheless, it did not, or perhaps she deliberately chose to ignore the warning. Be that as it may, she at any rate yielded herself to its influence, or at the very least was at no pains to withstand it. The moment was coming, however, when to withstand it completely would be imperative.

Whitsuntide fell late that year. It so happened that the annual festival which takes place in the University of Cambridge, and which is called the "May Week" because it occurs always in June, took place that year during the Whitsun holidays.

To this academic carnival Ivor Clay had been specially invited, as the guest of a friend who had once been his tutor and who was now the Head of a House. Ivor accepted the invitation, but only on condition that Mr. Lexham, who was himself an old Trinity man, brought the rest of the party to the Bull Hotel for the same week. It speaks a good deal for Ivor Clay's powers of persuasion that

he was able to induce his host to spend a good deal more money than he had the smallest desire to do, merely to give pleasure to his wife and daughter. As to Molly Lexham, she never from that time faltered in the conviction that Ivor Clay was a man who, if he wanted anything, was certain, no matter how apparently impossible its attainment might seem to be, to get it—which was perhaps rather more than his due. But if you, like Molly, had been for several years moving heaven and earth to persuade a relentless parent to do a particular thing, and having at last relinquished your efforts as hopeless, suddenly found an outsider coolly achieving in three hours that which you had failed to attain in so many years, you would no doubt have formed an equally exaggerated estimate of such a one's abilities.

At all events Molly Lexham got three good balls, two concerts, a dramatic performance by the A. D. C., and as many "teas" and "luncheons" as she could well accommodate at the hands of the University of Cambridge during that especial week. That she owed them all at least as much to the good offices of Ivor Clay as she owed the consent of her father to her being there at all, she was well aware. Equally well aware of it was Susan Romer, who, as one of the party from Longhaise, spent that May Week in Cambridge also. But Susan was not aware that it was to her, and to her only, that Molly Lexham really owed a debt of gratitude; since if Susan had not been one of the party, it is exceedingly doubtful whether Ivor Clay would have been there either. Susan did not in the least realise this. But neither did she realise that the days and nights which fled away for her friend Molly in a delightful succession of undergraduate festivities, represented to her merely a fresh epoch of intercourse with one man out of all those which the past and present of the university had collected together. If at Cambridge Susan Romer's intercourse with this man

led imperceptibly to a closer intimacy, no doubt it was because the whole party, even Mr. and Mrs. Lexham themselves, were so much engrossed and engulfed in the whirl of distractions and amusements into which they had been plunged, as to have become regardless each of the other.

To be alone in a crowd is easy. Ivor Clay and Susan managed to be alone—together—during those crowded hours very easily indeed.

They were glorious days—days of brilliant beauty, when the world was just putting on the radiant garments of her summer attire. Ivor Clay thought he had never seen his old university look more lovely. Susan Romer, who had never seen it before, thought that never in her life had she beheld anything fairer than its grey courts, its green lawns, its limpid river. Perhaps to them both Cambridge was bathed just then in the light that was never on land or sea, that they beheld its weather-stained walls and grave courts in the roseate flush of a summer dawn; a dawn destined possibly to fade by and by into a dull grey day, but none the less ethereally beautiful in its transient and illusive glory.

He took her everywhere, constituting himself almost unconsciously her cicerone, although presumably her host was quite as well qualified to act thus. But Ivor Clay, perhaps because some secret presentiment warned him that days such as these would never return again; perhaps because it is in the nature of such a man under all circumstances to take the lead, consciously or unconsciously; or perhaps because when a man of such a sort allows strong feeling to assume a mastery over him, he can no more oppose its dictates than others can oppose his will—from any or all such causes it followed that Ivor Clay, whose whole idea of the delights of the May Week was the pleasure of piloting Susan Romer through it, managed to do so entirely to his own satisfaction, and, it seemed pretty evident, to hers as well.

Four days of such intercourse will bring two people, mutually attracted, very closely together.

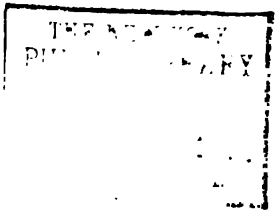
Susan Romer did not even attempt to deny that it was bringing Ivor Clay very close to her. If she was not equally clear as to its bringing her close to him—well, Susan Romer was a woman. There were certain solid and most valid reasons why her intercourse with him should not pass a certain point. The existence of these reasons was, she believed, quite sufficient to ensure that beyond that point her intercourse would not go.

Susan certainly was a woman—more, the most womanly of women, which doubtless was why she failed to see that it could make any difference to either of them that Ivor Clay should be left in total ignorance of the existence of any such restricting circumstances. Perhaps she also failed to perceive how completely this man was bending her to his own will, how entirely he seemed, so far, able to command her time, her attention, her interest.

They had been together for the greater part of most of the days that week; they were together on one especial day which neither ever afterwards forgot. Their whole party had been at a luncheon at one college, and now the others had gone to an afternoon concert at another. Neither Susan nor Clay felt themselves drawn to the concert. They were to take tea at half-past five with a very well-known don in his rooms, and they seemed to find it pleasanter to fill up the interval between the conclusion of the luncheon party and the don's afternoon tea, in strolling about the Backs, where the music of their own voices doubtless afforded them a sweeter feast of sound than the exertions of the Choral Society, whose harmonies they had disdained to encounter.

It was close upon five o'clock as they stood together on the bridge at King's. The glorious sun was already beginning to creep downwards to

"IVOR CLAY CONTENTED HIMSELF WITH CONTEMPLATING HER."
—*Page 81.*



his nightly rest, and the shadows already were beginning to lengthen. Susan leaned against the parapet of the bridge and contemplated the view that was now almost familiar to her. Ivor Clay contented himself with contemplating her. She was dressed in soft white muslin, with lace-edged frills at the throat and wrists, and a large black hat. Under the shade of the hat's brim he could see that her cheeks were softly flushed, for the afternoon was still very hot; while her eyes looked darker and more mistily soft than usual, in part doubtless from the shadowing effect of the hat's wide brim, in part possibly from other causes. She stood quite silently for some minutes, while her companion, close beside her, came to the conclusion that ostrich feathers touching a woman's coils of waving hair afford to the casual eye of man a pleasing conjunction. As they stood thus, the choir-boys of King's College Chapel passed them on their way to the daily evening service. Susan dreamily watched them marching decorously two-and-two, their well-brushed silk hats, short collegiate gowns and broad snowy lay-down collars conducing to the general impression of neatness, orderliness and good care which the boys themselves presented.

Ivor Clay's gaze followed that of his companion as it rested on the small moving procession.

"There," he said presently, looking first at her and then back again to the boys, who were by this time nearly at the door of the great chapel, "there you see a triumph of training and order that would be impossible in the country that I have just come from."

She withdrew her eyes from the view before her, and she turned their glance on the speaker. Then she smiled.

"Oh, but they are very disorderly in New Britain."

"And yet," he returned, quietly, "out of chaos order proceeds."

She seemed to feel a sort of implied rebuke in the words, although nothing was further from the speaker's intention.

"Yes," she said, hurriedly, "but not without the intervention of an intelligence to induce it."

Clay smiled, a smile in which if there was something of deprecation at the implied flattery, there was something as well of gratification; for what man is there who does not like to be flattered by the one woman who is most attractive to him in the world!

He came closer to her and leaned against the parapet of the bridge beside her. The feathers of her hat almost brushed his face.

"After all," she said, speaking a trifle quickly, "there is no place like England; it is *home*, you see."

The man beside her smiled. "I fear," he said pleasantly, without a shadow of bitterness in his accents, "that I do not recognise that feeling."

She raised her eyes to his face, and the expression of her own softened. She knew so much of the reasons for such a speech that it was perfectly intelligible to her. A great part of the secret of his attraction for her lay in her knowledge of his past. She knew that he had been obliged to leave England to look for a livelihood in a country where he had arrived nearly penniless. She knew, for it was common property, that the man who had entered that country practically a pauper, with nothing but his youth and his manhood and his education to aid him, could come to England a comparatively few years later, one of the richest men in the Empire. He had told her himself of his poverty, although it is true he had not thought it necessary to add that it was merely his own sense of honour that chose poverty in preference to a patrimony of three thousand a year. That never occurred to Ivor Clay to boast of, even to the woman he loved.

As his eyes met hers now a certain light and

intensity came into them. He looked at her for a moment very steadily, then he spoke again.

"Miss Romer," he said, speaking slowly and very gravely and hesitatingly for him, "home is a word that conveys different meanings to different people. To most men, I suppose, however, it has at any rate one especial meaning"—he paused for half a second, then proceeded, still in the same tones—"I am not going to pretend to any intense feeling about the past, but so far as I am concerned the fact remains that I have never in my life had a home at all."

The girl's face flushed. She raised her head impulsively.

"Oh, but you will, some day; you have done so much, that"—she stammered and broke off abruptly. Possibly it flashed across her that she had been betrayed into a dangerously rash speech. But Susan also realised, with a momentary sense of humour, that she was frequently betrayed into dangerously rash speeches.

Ivor Clay's lips trembled slightly.

"You mean," he said, filling up the pause in her words, which she realised now with another dart of humorous despair, was even more rashly significant than the words themselves, "you mean that I can make a home for myself." He looked at her again. "That," he said, deliberately, "is not a thing that any man can do quite alone. Miss Romer"—his voice insensibly lowered itself, even as Susan Romer's head seemed to lower itself down over her outstretched arms—"Miss Romer, most men have their dreams, even the least sentimental of them, of one day making a home which shall be worthy of the name. But to do so there is a further necessity involved, they have to win some one who can either make or mar every dream of a man's home and heart."

He paused. There was a moment of silence that had in it something of tension. Clay looked at his companion's down-bent head. He could

see that the soft frills at her throat were stirred slightly. He could not see her face.

"Perhaps," he said gently, but there was nothing desponding in his voice, "I have said too much —or said it too soon."

There was another pause. Another moment—or was it several moments?—of a silence that had the same curious element of tension in it.

Susan Romer laid her hands down on the bridge and gripped the stone parapet between her fingers.

"I think," she said, and her eyes gazed down unseeingly into the water beneath, "I ought to tell you that I am engaged to be married."

The words dropped from her lips one by one. Severally, yet in their entirety they fell upon his ear like the strokes of a bell. For a moment Ivor Clay looked like a man who had got a blow and had been stunned by it. In another moment he had recovered himself. But it seemed to him as if the gorgeous sunshine had been blotted out by a cold grey haze that had fallen over the very face of Nature before his eyes. Neither uttered a word for some minutes. He looked upward across the intervening space to where the pinnacles of King's Chapel stood up against the blue sky; her eyes were still bent upon the dim sluggish waters beneath, the river whereon so many years before the man at her side had fought out to the end a certain very pregnant battle. He was the first to break the silence.

"I must ask you," he said, and if his voice was slightly flatter than its ordinary *timbre* allowed it to be, it was only natural, "I must ask you to pardon me for speaking as I did. But please remember that I had not the faintest idea that you —that—that anything—any engagement of the kind existed."

The girl raised her head. Her face was flushed; her eyes were very dark. The usual mistiness that hung over the iris, so common to short-sighted eyes, was rather intensified.

"It is only known to a few—very—intimate friends—as yet." Her voice, too, had not quite its accustomed tone.

Ivor Clay looked at the speaker with the clear straight smile that was characteristic of him.

"Thank you," he said, gallantly; "it is a confidence worthy of you, and which you may be assured I—shall—respect."

The mist that lay over Susan's eyes a second later, and blurred the landscape before her sight so that the grey blocks of Clare and King's, separated by the intervening chapel, seemed to blend together into one great dark solid wall, was a mist of unshed tears.

"Miss Romer"—she did not raise her eyes to his, and she trembled as his voice smote her ear—"there are some things in this life that we never want to part with, and friendship is one of them. Although it is not likely that I shall ever be much in England, may I hope that wherever I am, I shall still have your friendship?"

She looked at him, but she did not speak. Perhaps she could not; perhaps verbal assurance on her part was not needed.

Ivor Clay straightened himself resolutely, but his glance rested for one moment more on the dark masses of Susan's hair and his lips whitened slowly.

A gay party of young people, girls in brilliant summer toilettes with an attendant phalanx of undergraduates, came towards them. They swept over the bridge, passing the two people standing there silently.

One of the girls was trying to repeat a bit of well-known doggerel, regarding the

> "Dons of John's
> Who dined on Swans,"

and was coquettishly reproaching her escort for not teaching her the accurate version. Their voices and their laughter swept onwards, the echo

of it floating back again to the two people they had left behind them.

"There was a young man of St. John's
Who always dined upon Swans."

"Oh, *what* comes next?"

And so on, and so on, till the gay voice of the speaker and her equally gay figure were out of sight and ear-shot.

Susan watching the party mechanically, shivered a little in the warm June sunshine. She saw Ivor Clay take out his watch and glance at it, yet his action conveyed no meaning to her mind. Nothing at the moment was present to her mind except a curiously darkened landscape, a landscape broken by human figures going onward, onward, through the twilight darkness—themselves, in her eyes, but half ethereal shapes—while in her ears there was the sound as of the distant murmuring of waters, with ever and again rising above it, the quick girlish treble notes echoing and re-echoing:

"Oh—h—there was a young man of St. John's
Who lived—on a diet of Swans."

She did not think how curious it was that the meaningless words should take possession of her ear at such a moment. Indeed she was not capable of drawing any comparison between the outward and the inward circumstances of her position just then.

She shivered again slightly, even while she smiled with desperate bravery after the party which had just passed.

The greatest thing in the world had been offered to her and she had been bound in honour to reject it.

Perhaps the woman's part was none the less hard, because she was equally bound in honour not to let the man beside her know that it was thus she realised it.

She saw her companion studying his watch at-

tentively. For one second she let her eyes rest on the broad down-bent face; for one second she noted afresh the lines of strong vigour round the firm shut lips, and the square determined jaw that its owner had so unsparingly denounced. As he raised his eyes she averted hers, quickly.

He put his watch back again into his pocket.

"It is time," he said, calmly, "for us to go."

She raised herself and went with him; it seemed only natural to her to obey him, and yet Susan had been more accustomed hitherto to exact obedience than to yield it.

They left the bridge and walked slowly up towards King's. As they reached the chapel the strains of the organ smote their ear through the open doorway through which people were coming out. Service was over and the organist was playing the concluding voluntary. Moved by a sudden impulse, Susan entered the chapel. Ivor Clay followed her. They stood in the ante-chapel listening to the roll of the organ notes. The organist was playing the wondrous Prelude to the "Lohengrin."

The gorgeous outburst of martial music that rolls and reverberates as the chords reach their fullest development in the middle distance, was now giving place again to the strains ever rising higher and higher of the marvellous vibrating climax where pizzicato of violins and flutes, in a combination never before conceived of by mortal music, rises in piercing succession, strain after strain, each above the other. Higher and higher, clearer, colder, more passionately passionless, more purely intense, each note struck the air.

Susan Romer felt as if every yearning semitone was carrying her with it closer and closer into the very heart of life and the very mystery of life itself, until her own heart felt the tension of the melody as though it were being played on the living strings of it. In the end the great music seemed to catch her up in its arms and unfold to

her things which eye cannot see, neither tongue utter.

But to Ivor Clay the roll and tremulo of the music's message carried but one conviction. With his eyes resting involuntarily on the two colossal winged figures that stand aloft at either summit of the organ's pipes, each with a gilt trumpet to its lips, he felt the conviction fasten heavily upon his heart, that once again in his life he had been very near to a great boon, and once again he had just missed it.

CHAPTER IX.

NEVERTHELESS, deep as this conviction was, it did not once occur to Clay that he could make the slightest attempt to reverse its conditions. The man who had fought that battle with himself under the willows of the Cam so many years before, was hardly the sort of man to whom such a possibility would even present itself. It is true that during the years which had intervened between those days and the present, life had held for Ivor Clay more than one perplexing conflict, and that he came out of such conflicts not seldom after a fashion that served his enemies with opportunities of saying bitter things about him. All the same, even they had come to admit, grudgingly perhaps, and of necessity, that there were certain things which this man might be trusted not to do.

Now when a human being achieves a reputation such as this it means that a certain order of character is being built up. But character is not built any more than any other edifice in a day, and in its fabric, as in that of other edifices, many stones go to the building. It is not possible that among so many there shall not be some that have no flaw or spot or roughness in them. Yet every building rests upon certain important stones—foundation and key stones, so to speak—and it is necessary that these be of the best and finest material. When Ivor Clay settled that contest at Cambridge seventeen years before, he had, without knowing it, put into the edifice of his own character a foundation stone of a type calculated to bear a superstructure of a particular kind, as well as to give a

certain permanent quality to the whole building. At the same time, circumstances had built in with that fine stone, smaller bricks of less noble proportions and less fine finish. It would depend very much therefore upon circumstances, stress of weather for example, or strain of time, how far these would show in the outer surface of the building, or affect its inner and permanent design.

Ivor Clay went to London at the close of the May Week festivities at Cambridge. So did Susan Romer, but it was characteristic of them that neither made the smallest allusion to the fact that their present destination was identical, or the faintest suggestion of a possible meeting there, or elsewhere in the future. It was equally characteristic of them that no member of their party even suspected the crisis through which they had passed, or that the intercourse so pleasantly inaugurated had been resolutely cut short, never again, they both believed, to be resumed.

Meantime the events of the world wait not upon lovers' partings, though in justice to Ivor and Susan, their leave-taking cannot be said to have been, in the strict sense of the term, of that nature.

He merely reckoned up in his own mind another point in his life where circumstance had been unmannerly to him. But he had, he assured himself, become by this time so well used to its trick of doing him a nasty turn, that he was able to accept it without affording the author the gratification of betraying his sense of injury. Yet the sense of injury was there.

Clay found himself detained for a longer time than he expected in London. But he found also that the Government, after the manner of governments, were curiously dilatory in settling the matter that had brought him to England. With governments, he was well aware, it is no good to chafe; and as he was strongly bent upon getting his own way with the British Government in this big matter, he was content to await their pleasure

in the small detail of a seemingly unnecessary delay in the settlement of it. Once or twice it struck him that the delay was curious; that it was even suspicious also struck him once or twice, but not very forcibly. He had had certain assurances. Now a particular order of character is not prone to cast unwarranted discredit on the assurance of others —which is the strength, or the weakness, of such characters.

He went to dine one evening with Henry Tilson. Among all the chances and changes of his life, and among all the duties and distractions of his career, he had never failed to pay the fullest measure of affection and attention to the friend of his early years. Mr. Tilson, who was now growing into an old man, lived at Twickenham—where he had a pretty pseudo Queen Anne red-brick house, and a garden whose vineries he prided himself beat those of half the ancestral mansions of England to fits—about half way between the spot whereon Pope's celebrated villa once stood and Strawberry Hill. His affection for Ivor Clay was as deep as ever, his pride in him quite intense, although he believed that the latter was kept in check by a traditional adhorrence of the political principles which had had so large a share in making his beloved boy—as he still called him--the notable man he was. He believed also that Ivor Clay was not so tainted with these abhorrent principles as—so Mr. Tilson liked to express it—" he chose to appear." Which shows that the elder man knew just so much of the younger as the latter cared to allow. Nothing, however, could wipe out of Henry Tilson's sight the one irrefutable fact, that Ivor Clay had deliberately refused to abrogate his feelings of honour at the price of three thousand a year. Fifty years of the practice of the law as a solicitor had taught him the value to place upon a solid fact such as that. As to opinions! Fifty years of legal intercourse with his fellow-men had shown Mr. Tilson

very clearly, also, the exact marketable value of opinions.

He looked serene and satisfied now as he sat at his own beautifully appointed dinner table with Ivor Clay, and gazed out through the French windows of the Queen Anne house (such curious congruities do happen at Twickenham) at the dazzling succession of "ribbon-borders" which his Scotch landscape gardener earned the salary of a curate for condescending to employ his great mind —his subordinates supplying the manual labour— in devising. He pushed the port and the madeira to Ivor and smiled at him warmly, as the evening sunshine shone in upon the latter's great square head, with its thick thatch of curiously flaxen hair.

To Mr. Tilson's eyes there was, however, this evening, a certain heaviness resting upon the face opposite to his. He believed that he could guess the reason for an expression so unwonted, but it struck him as slightly curious that its owner did not speak of the reason to him. But he remembered that Ivor Clay, like every man of commanding will-power, could be very reticent indeed when he chose. Nevertheless, Mr. Tilson was also aware that reticence with Ivor Clay never took the form of dull or sullen disinclination to speech. The French blood that his mother had bequeathed to him lightened to a great extent the immovable taciturnity which Englishmen of his type and force of character so often display. The mixture of races in him largely constituted his especial charm; it was also in great measure answerable for his particular talents.

Mr. Tilson waited for a few minutes after the dessert had been laid on the table and the two men had the room to themselves. Finally his curiosity got the better of him.

"So," he exclaimed presently, not without a certain temerity visible in his accents, and in the gesture with which he brushed away an imaginary crumb from the silk collar of his dining-coat, "the

Government have offered the governorship of New Britain to Lord Sithrington."

The glass of port that Ivor Clay was in the act of raising to his lips nearly fell from his up-lifted hand. He leaned forward in his chair and the veins in his forehead swelled suddenly.

"What!"

The simple monosyllable literally, as it sounded, shot from between the speaker's lips, all at once sent Henry Tilson's thoughts back to a former occasion, many years before, when the same voice had uttered in very much the same accents that identical word. But Ivor Clay had learned many lessons in the art of self-restraint—the greatest art in the whole conduct of life—since that day.

He set his wine-glass down now with perfect deliberation. His face was instantly under his control again. If the muscles of the mouth betrayed a slight hint of strain, it was not so much as to be remarkable.

"Lord Sithrington"—he repeated the name with perfect composure—"are you *quite* sure——?"

Mr. Tilson touched a small silver gong that stood on the table together with a silver spirit lamp for lighting the cigars.

"An evening paper which I read in the train coming down is my authority," he said. Then turning to the man-servant who had just appeared at his elbow in response to the summons of the gong, he said: "Fetch me the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which you will find on the table in the study, and then let us have coffee as soon as possible."

When the newspaper was brought to him, he laid his finger on the paragraph to which he desired to draw Ivor's attention and handed it to him in silence. In silence also, Clay took it from him, and read the following:

"We learn from an authoritative source that the Government have offered the vacant governorship of New Britain to the Earl of Sithrington. The appoint-

ment, which extends over a period of five years, will be something of an amusing experiment. Lord Sithrington is a very young man; his chief claim to distinction up to the present has been that he is the owner of the Sithrington collieries—no doubt a very substantial claim too."

That was all.

Ivor Clay laid down the paper and looked at Henry Tilson. The eyes of the two men met, and there was another moment of peculiar silence.

"It is the first I have heard of it," said the younger man, presently, and though his voice was perfectly steady, there was a certain vibration in it. "If the Government have really done this, they—I speak in confidence—have broken faith with me—and—I shall be sorry for them."

"So shall I," said Henry Tilson, gazing meditatively through the beautiful rich hue of his '64 port. "I assure you, I shall also," he added, in even more measured accents, and apparently as an after-thought, "be sorry for New Britain."

Ivor Clay smiled.

"New Britain," he said, with cold suavity, "will survive the reign of the Earl of Sithrington."

"I have no doubt it will," returned the old lawyer, with imperturbable gravity. "Countries, nations and individuals survive—many things." He paused. Henry Tilson seldom permitted himself to be sententious.

An instant later, as his eyes again sought his companion's face, he noticed that the heaviness which had been so remarkable had in great measure passed away. It had given place, he could see, to an evident sense of indignation; but an indignation alert rather than depressed. Mr. Tilson twirled his eye-glasses round in his fingers. Evidently, he reflected, it had not been the news of the appointment to New Britain that had been responsible for that depression, since Ivor had given him his word that he had known nothing of it. *Ergo*, that some other cause must have been at work, it

scarcely needed the shrewd deductions of a lawyer's mind to quickly conclude.

If he was desirous of finding out what that cause was he made no sign of it. Mr. Tilson had not practised law successfully for half a century for nothing. As he lighted a cigar and drank his coffee slowly, he took up what he conceived to be the younger man's cue, and drove the conversation forward gently, with a complete ignoring of all the difficult and delicate threads involved that did his histrionic capabilities full credit.

"I shall be curious," he said, musingly, "to know what impression Lord Sithrington will make on you."

Ivor Clay raised his eyebrows.

"Is he aware of my existence?" he responded, composedly.

"My dear boy," returned the other, with equal composure, "there are very few people in her Majesty's dominions who are not aware of the existence of Ivor Clay."

No person hearing them speak at that moment would by any possibility have suspected that the subject held any more personal interest for them than that involved in the intercourse of one public man with another. As to Mr. Tilson, he felt that Ivor Clay was doing him credit. The latter looked at him straightly.

"I see," he said, quietly; "the existence of Ivor Clay. Nothing further?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied the other, at once comprehending the challenge of the words.

Clay said nothing for a minute or two. Mr. Tilson fancied that behind his silence and his composure there was a certain weighing of past and future going on in his mind. Suddenly he raised his head.

"Well," he said, as if with the intention of dismissing the whole affair for the present, "a good deal will depend upon whether the report is true or not."

"Assuredly," said the other; "but the *Pall Mall* has the reputation, rightly or wrongly, of generally procuring accuracy before it ventures on announcements."

"Indeed!" Ivor Clay spoke politely, but with obvious lack of being impressed.

"I forgot," said Mr. Tilson, smiling, "that you seldom pay much attention to the newspapers."

"I fear," said Ivor Clay, "that is the case."

Probably it was because he had too clear a knowledge of how newspapers are compiled, but he did not add that.

All the same, whatever honour and glory is due to a newspaper that makes an unexpected announcement before its fellows have had time to get hold of the same item—an announcement that turned out to be absolutely true—was due to the evening paper in question.

It was true that the vacant governorship had been offered to Lord Sithrington, and it became equally true in a few days that Lord Sithrington had accepted the honour—which was a doubtful one—and the appointment, which was far from doubtful in certain respects at all events.

Not until the offer had been made and had been accepted was any intimation of it, other than he could obtain in the common reports of the clubs and the newspapers, made to Ivor Clay. When, at length, the minister in whose charge the affairs of New Britain reposed, did summon up courage to approach the man with whom he had deliberately juggled, he found the interview shorn of half its terrors by the demeanour which that man brought to it.

Nevertheless, had he but known it, he had in making the appointment done his Government and his party one of the worst turns that even a friend could do to either. But most governments and parties find themselves often using the prayer, "Save us from our friends."

Ivor Clay indeed made no sign; which in itself

would have been, to any one who knew him, the most ominous of signs. But the Government did not know him. Nor did they know that from the moment Lord Sithrington was appointed they aroused Ivor Clay's warmest enmity. Breaking faith with him as they had was an injury, he felt; appointing Lord Sithrington of all men on earth, was unconsciously adding insult to injury. That they were not aware of this, that Lord Sithrington himself was not aware of it, aroused in Ivor Clay's mind an unmistakable quiver of amusement, but none the less an implacable sense of animosity. It was not improbable, moreover, that by so doing the Government had put back the settlement of what was called the New British Question for an indefinite time; for even the English Government was forced to admit, that the most potent agent alive in the satisfactory settlement of that question was Ivor Clay. He was, also, they were perfectly well aware, the most powerful ally they could have secured. It was eminently characteristic of the methods of the Government to have held out one hand in apparently friendly overture to him, and at the same time dealt him a slap of insult with the other.

The expiration of the ex-governor's term of office in New Britain had brought Ivor Clay to England. As it happened, it fell to the lot of a particularly weak government to fill up a vacancy admittedly one of the most difficult to fill satisfactorily in the Empire. In their difficulty (which was not diminished by the fact that it was exceedingly difficult to find any man willing or able to undertake the office, which was invidious and expensive), the Government coquetted feebly with the one man able to help them—namely, Ivor Clay.

Ivor Clay had gone to New Britain a poor man to a poor country. He had come back to England a wealthy man, from a country no longer poor, whose sources of wealth he had practically

discovered. With the discovery of unsuspected sources of wealth, however, New Britain had of late years further undergone an acute development of her long-seated grievances against English rule, a portion of which development was due also to Ivor Clay. He had espoused without hesitation the side which New Britain protested (rather noisily perhaps), was the cause of Heaven-sent justice, but in espousing it he had, all the same, given it a somewhat fresh aspect.

He came to England to induce if not to force the Government to fill the vacant office in a way that, from his point of view, would be of unbounded importance and usefulness to the country. Of that country the English Government believed him to be an extraordinarily good judge. Of its needs and its necessities they were persuaded he knew more than any man living. Of his power to uphold or discredit their own influence there, they were equally persuaded. It might therefore have been supposed they would have gladly adopted his suggestion. But then his suggestion would have involved breaking through the narrow prejudices of purely party spirit, and appointing a man who had held office in an administration formed from the opposite party. It is true that the man in question had shown a breadth of view and of conduct that might fairly have absolved his appointment by a hostile Cabinet, no less than an admitted ability to deal with the various perplexities of the office and to benefit the country enormously.

But governments seldom find themselves able to benefit the country at their own expense. On this occasion they wavered, halted, shilly-shallied, looked this way and that way, made profuse assurances to Ivor Clay—exacting cunning pledges from him in return—and in the end appointed the only adherent they could find willing to take the office.

The net result of all this was that the Right

Honourable George Marmaduke Frederick, Earl of Sithrington, was gazetted Lieutenant-Governor and Governor-General of New Britain; that Ivor Clay prepared to return to that country with a revised version in his valise of the code of conduct due on the part of the country, and on his own part, towards the advisers of her Majesty left behind in England; that a certain lawyer well stricken in years and in knowledge of the world was—not for the first time—forcibly presented with the fact that the course of this world's affairs is frequently ordered in a manner calculated to arouse in certain minds a very delicate sensation of amusement, and that it is not necessary to go to the Adelphi Theatre, or anywhere else outside life itself and the calm pursuit of every-day human affairs, in order to witness melodrama of the most prismatic colouring.

Mr. Tilson in good sooth might have found even another streak of colour in the rainbow had he known a little more.

116175B

CHAPTER X.

"SUSAN, my own," said Mrs. Romer, after Susan's return from Cambridge, "you are looking pale."

Her daughter smiled.

"It is the agitating circumstances of my position," she said, and there was something in her voice that made her mother fold one hand over the other and exclaim, placidly:

"How you do laugh at poor George!"

The person thus addressed made no response. She went on with the piece of work upon which she was engaged. They were as usual in Susan's studio—where indeed Susan mostly lived. The windows were open, and beyond them one could see the garden and in the further distance a wavering gleam of the river beyond Chelsea Embankment. The modeller worked away rapidly. Once or twice a glimmering smile flickered across her face as she worked. It was plain that the work was proceeding satisfactorily. Suddenly she left off, and crossing the studio, took up a rough clay model, now quite dry. Taking it in one hand and the wet "squeeze" in the other, she placed them side by side on the table before her mother. The models represented the busts of two men.

"Look," she said, quickly.

Mrs. Romer turned round slowly, her knitting tucked under one hand.

"Well?" she said, enquiringly.

Susan pointed to the wet model.

"*That*," she said, speaking rather shortly and with a somewhat harsh intonation, "is a face and head created for modelling."

"Dear me," said her mother, and she glanced at it as she spoke with the most amiable indifference; "I suppose," she continued, "that is Mr. Clay. *How* you can do those—those heads from memory—I cannot understand. It is so very clever of you, darling. George, of course, I can imagine, perhaps; but a man like that whom you've only seen a few times! He's a plain man, too," concluded the speaker, as if that added another laurel to the artist's wreath.

Susan let her glasses drop with a sudden snap. She drew closer to the table and looked fixedly at the two heads and the two faces. Her own face grew dreamy as she looked at them.

"But the sheer power in that face," she said suddenly, half aloud and half to herself, as if she had forgotten that there was any one in the room besides herself. Then apparently she recollected. "The contrast, mother," she said, with a certain cool languor, "is startling, don't you think?"

"Yes," said her mother placidly, bestowing another flitting glance on the two. "George is a handsome young man, my dear." She gazed with entire complacency on the small narrow head and small aquiline features of the bust which represented her daughter's future husband.

Susan Romer caught her breath suddenly, as if something had hurt her. Then she laughed. She turned away from the two models, and seated herself carelessly on the extreme corner of the modelling bench.

"I wish," she said reflectively, and it was impossible from the way in which she spoke to determine whether she was in earnest, or merely ironical, "that George was half a head taller."

"George," returned her mother, with a gravity that there was certainly no mistaking, "is a very dignified young man. Besides, his height is really——"

"Five feet six—*barely*," interposed her daughter, decisively. "No man can be dignified at five feet

six. He shouldn't attempt it. Dignity is a dreadful snare, mother. Oh yes, indeed it is, to little men. A little man should be vivacious, amusing, cheeky"—she flicked her fingers lightly—"but *never* dignified. Besides"—she resumed her aspect of complete seriousness—"dignity has quite gone out."

"Indeed," said her mother, with a sort of blank bewilderment, "everything respectable seems to me to have gone out, as you call it."

"Oh no, mother, think of George! Why, his respectability would—would infect—I mean—inspire a nation!"

Her mother laughed.

"Dear amusing darling!" she said fondly, with a glance at her daughter to emphasise the words. Her daughter chose to wilfully misinterpret the exclamation.

"I shouldn't call him an amusing darling, on the whole," she said, with a little trill of laughter in her voice. "Oh"—with an inimitable glance of innocent awakening—"you meant me! Thanks, mother dear. Wasn't it poor Corney Grain who used to say I merely amuse?—but that is something, isn't it?"

"You were always amusing," observed her mother, with placid adoration, "even as a baby."

"Gracious!" said Susan; "another remarkable instance of infant genius."

She stretched out her hand and took up the wet model of Ivor Clay's head again. Her hand went over it, adding a touch here and there, lingering with a sort of tenderness over the waves of the hair. She had quickly noted the characteristic fall of the latter over the brow and had contrived to model it cleverly, giving it just the natural sweep.

Her face had changed all in a minute.

Mrs. Romer raised her eyes and looked at her.

"My treasure," she said, reproachfully, "you tire yourself over that work—oh, but I know you

do! You look tired this minute. You can't deceive your old mother."

A tiny flush crept over her daughter's face, and she laid the wet model out of her hand again. Then she took up the model of the man whom she had promised to marry.

The elder lady turned her knitting round and round in a curiously quick manner.

"I don't see," she said, speaking with an odd, hasty indistinctness, "how George can do without a wife in New Britain."

Susan opened her eyes widely after her own inimitable manner. Her mother seeing her could have groaned aloud; she knew it would be hopeless to expect Susan to be serious—and sensible—when she opened her eyes like that.

"My dear mother!" she exclaimed, with concentrated essence of guilelessness in her every accent, "is it penal in New Britain for a man not to have a wife?"

"Susan," said her mother, "you know very well what I mean. Think of George's position there."

"That is just what I am thinking of. I can think of nothing else. It's quite overwhelmed me. But I shouldn't dream of overwhelming poor George at such a moment with—a wife. Dear me, no. It would be positive cruelty. Getting married—for the first time too—is so dreadfully disturbing. I can't think of anything more disturbing—I can't, upon my word. It would be so wrong to unsettle George's mind at such a moment."

Mrs. Romer laughed.

"For talking sheer nonsense," she said, dauntlessly, "I don't know your equal, Susan. All the same, it is your duty to go with George to New Britain."

The girl, sitting on the end of the table, cast down her eyes quickly; so quickly that her mother did not see the sudden flash, almost of terror, that leaped up in them for a second. Only

for a second though; in another second her mood changed.

She jumped off the bench, and, crossing the room, stood in front of a curious but pretty corner cabinet—evidently a receptacle for hidden "properties" of artistic usefulness. This cabinet had a long panel of quaint bevelled glass and was like nothing in the world but itself. The glass was fine looking-glass. Susan Romer stood up in front of the glass.

"Where are you now?" enquired her mother plaintively, but without turning round to look. She would have told you that if you turned round to look at every one of Susan's vagaries you would leave yourself little time to do anything else.

"Here, mother," answered her daughter, serenely. "It has just struck me that I really must practise—smiling. A gracious smile. Mother, what is a gracious smile? Could one get one in Bond Street?—for it would be well to take one out in my box, don't you think? or a couple of dozen, of nicely graduated shades of meaning, if possible? Hem!" She looked at her own reflection in the long glass and suddenly made the regulation "bob" wherewith privileged humanity is permitted to approach royalty, nowadays.

"May it please your Excellency," said Susan demurely, to her own reflection.

Mrs. Romer had turned round after all. She was just in time to see the bob which accompanied the words. Mrs. Romer laughed with flattering appreciation.

"Her Excellency," continued Susan, impressively, "has been graciously pleased—excellencies, mother, are always graciously pleased—(it sounds monotonous, perhaps I shall try being ungraciously displeased)—her Excellency has been ungraciously displeased to——" She broke off, frowned at herself heavily and then continued: "I can't manage that smile. I wonder if there's a school anywhere. I'll look up the advertisements in the newspapers.

'How vice-royalties ought to smile. Best brand. As used in the Royal drawing-rooms: absolutely incapable of detection. One lesson five guineas, or the course, four and a half each. Perfect in twelve lessons. Nervous riders'—oh, mother, I'm getting mixed now—'nervous pupils specially taken care of.' I know I'll be a nervous pupil, mother. No, I can't face New Britain—till—till—I've learned to—smile."

A shadow crossed her face. Did it occur to her that there was more meaning to her in the words than lay on the surface? She was conscious of a second in which a blank abstraction settled down upon her, before she heard her mother's voice again.

"Well," her mother was saying, hopefully, "I should talk to George about it, if I were you."

A heavier shadow darkened Susan's eyes. She lifted her head with a gesture peculiar to her.

"I shall be happy to do so, mother, when George condescends to talk to *me* on the subject."

"Darling," said her mother, soothingly, "I am sure he has written to you very nicely."

"Yes," said the girl; "two days after the *newspapers* informed me that he had been offered and accepted the appointment."

"Well," said her mother, who was obviously unimpressed by her daughter's view, "men don't talk of affairs like that, it would be most injudicious."

Her daughter faced round.

"Yes," she said, satirically, "particularly as he had asked me to marry him."

"Oh, dear!" said her mother, plaintively; "I am sure your father never spoke of his affairs to me when we were engaged. I really never wanted him to. You girls nowadays are so different."

"Yes," said her daughter, incisively, "we are."

Then the sunshine flashed back into her face once more.

"Mother," she said, drolly, "my Excellency will

now retire to—ah—reorganise her toilette"—she waved her hand—"to be quite candid, mother dear, my Excellency is exceedingly dirty. Art is long and time is fleeting—towards—dinner."

She went out of the studio laughing. But she was not laughing when she reached her own room. She did not wait even to wash the clay from her fingers before taking a letter out of a locked drawer in a small escritoire that formed part of the set of Liberty fitments in her bedroom. She held the letter in the sunshine and read it again.

"MY DARLING SUSAN,"

"They want me to be Governor of New Britain. I dare say you've seen all about it in the newspapers. I consulted Aunt Honoria and she declared I must; so that settled it. It strikes me as rather a bore. How does it strike you?

"Your devoted

"SITHRINGTON."

Susan Romer folded the letter carefully. A smile came upon her lips that no man who loves a woman ought to bring there.

"It strikes me," she said to herself, "that I ought to have come before Aunt Honoria." Then she lifted her head. "He didn't mean it for a slight," she said again to herself, "but—men—are different. The big man and the little man. . . . the contrast is . . . amusing . . . though mother did not see it . . . that way." The thinker's lip curled. "George"—her thoughts took on an exact reproduction of her mother's accents and her mother's complacency—"George is a *handsome* young man." She locked the letter into the escritoire again. "Handsome is that handsome does, mother mine"—and then she pulled herself up short; for she knew that a danger-signal stood right across her path, and whatever Susan Romer might be she was at least honest.

Nevertheless, the thing rankled. He had consulted an aunt whom he disliked and feared before

the woman whom he loved and was going to make his wife, in one of the most important questions of his life. He had allowed her—Susan—to learn from a newspaper that which his hand or his tongue should have been the first to announce to her.

The girl was too honest and too generous not to absolve him utterly from any wish, or any consciousness of slighting her. But, that he should understand her so little! Her heart contracted. Not so had some one else understood her. Some one else! A great man, she thought, proudly. A man whom principalities and powers feared mightily. A man who was deep in the very heart of human affairs of the most stupendous order. The woman's imagination, you see, left nothing wanting to Ivor Clay in its summing up—but that is the woman's way, is it not? *That* man, Susan told herself now, with a little quiver of hot, aching pain that angered her, had done her the honour of wishing for her opinion, her judgment, her sympathy in his most urgent affairs.

Nothing in all her life had pleased her so much as that.

"Poor George," said the girl, and she smiled. "Your Excellency," she finished, "we mustn't expect too much of you." But the tears filled her eyes. A moment later they were dried again by the warmth of a smile that stole into them.

She was thinking again of some one of whom she might expect a great deal—everything in fact—and not be disappointed.

The tinge of rose-colour that came up into Susan's cheeks was no doubt as symbolical as it was significant. For the danger-signal was still across the line, and danger-signals are generally red.

CHAPTER XI.

MAPLETOWN was the capital of New Britain. How, or why it had been given the name had never been satisfactorily determined—except, perhaps, that no such thing as a maple-tree had ever been seen anywhere near it.

Some one said of New Britain once that it was "the home of anomalies." No doubt that is why it was like no place on earth except itself, and why it was so indubitably amusing. For New Britain was very amusing, much indeed as a clever, spoilt child is amusing.

There are times, however, when even to the most infatuated of parents, the cleverest of spoilt children are apt to become less amusing than usual. In the eyes of the parent country New Britain was quite old enough to have mended its ways in some respects. Nevertheless, New Britain, despite the restraining influences of age, remained as intractable, as irresponsible, and as irresistibly youthful as if it had really discovered the hidden elixir that baffled the keenest researches of ancient alchemists, and had secured for itself alone the blessing of perpetual youth. Every blessing is no doubt mixed; even one so overwhelming as the discovery of the elixir of perpetual youth. This you would quickly discover if you had to do with New Britain.

Mapletown was on the sea coast. It boasted a fine situation on Mapletown Bay and exalted itself as a metropolis second to none in the Empire—London only excepted. Even London it was good enough to admit merely exceeded it in size. For everything else the order of precedence was Maple-

town *and*—London. What London thought of this is not on record. But London is not given to thinking of anybody except—herself. She seldom makes comparisons—not because she thinks with Mrs. Malaprop that "comparisons are odorous" but simply because it never occurs to her to compare small things with great.

When Ivor Clay steamed into Mapletown harbour one fine morning upon his return from that momentous visit to England, it struck him, as it had more than once struck him before, that with regard to its situation Mapletown could give points to many European sites which have possibly earned a greater name and fame. It struck him, too, that on this particular day the harbour was looking unusually gay, not to say brilliant. The various craft in harbour—including the stately detachment of British war vessels always stationed in New British waters—were gaily decorated, while a good show of bunting was discernible in Mapletown itself. Cannon was booming from the British gunboats, and a squadron of British cavalry could be seen waiting to form a "guard of honour" for somebody or something.

As Clay's steamer drew alongside the jetty, Ivor, gathering up his traps with his usual quick, decisive manner, recognised without the slightest difficulty the cause of the unwonted stir and demonstration. Leaving the boat, Clay crossed the gangway into the street. At the end of the gangway there was on the right-hand side a door which opened upon a flight of steps and led directly into the street above. This door, which was conspicuously marked "Private," was supposed to be reserved for the use of the steamer company's officers, but as a matter of fact was also reserved for the use of such persons as were influential enough to command a special convenience above that accorded to the ordinary public. For, by using this door and the staircase within, the traveller saved himself at least a quarter of an hour. Towards

this door Ivor Clay unhesitatingly made straight. He had his hand in his pocket and was about to draw out a coin for the custodian in charge, when his progress was suddenly barred by the form of a burly policeman.

The burly policeman upraised his blue-coated arm and motioned Clay back.

"No thoroughfare here!" said the numbered one, in husky tones that made the simple announcement sound like a stupendous cabalistic formula.

Ivor Clay merely looked at the speaker. It did not yet occur to him that in New Britain there was any man—even a policeman—to order him out of his course. He nodded good-humouredly at the other, but without speaking; as if implying indeed that he quite shared the item of knowledge conveyed to him, but that he, personally, did not represent a thoroughfare. At the same time he pressed onwards quite unhesitatingly. With equal lack of hesitation he found his way uncompromisingly barred.

"Passengers—left hand side," murmured the law's custodian, as if he could make allowances for the boundless stupidity of human nature outside the police force, and was willing to condescend to its enlightenment. At the same time his ingenuous, youthful countenance, aglow with the latent fire of professional enthusiasm, was also somewhat heated from the unwonted atmosphere of excitement that he felt about him just then.

Ivor Clay again looked at him with a gleam of amusement in his eyes. But there were people behind him, and he had too much of the Englishman's morbid horror of being made to look foolish to altogether relish this interference.

"My good man," he said, pleasantly, "it's all right. Let me pass."

His good man contemplated him imperturbably from under the imposing ægis of his be-chained and emblazoned helmet.

"My-orders," he ejaculated in the same husky tones, running the two words into one, perhaps because he considered it added impressiveness to his dictum, or perhaps because the habit of "running-in" extended itself unconsciously from force of habit to words as well as persons.

Ivor Clay looked at him steadily.

The man may have felt the message of Clay's eyes, for he assumed an entirely respectful demeanour towards him. He was unusually slow of comprehension, or he might easily have recognised Ivor's identity; for the portraits of the popular leader and financier were scattered widely over New Britain, and one actually adorned the homestead in the country which this young man had only left within the past few weeks. But he was unusually stupid, besides being completely overbalanced at the prevailing excitement of his situation; for New Britain does not have a new governor every day, and though the English governor is, traditionally, of course, an object of hatred—so-called—to the patriot, it does not prevent patriots turning out in their hundreds to look at the English governor, or from taking the most extraordinarily acute interest in his most trivial affairs. What then between the engaging novelty of his own position, which had not yet worn off, and the near approach of incoming viceregal majesty, the representative of law and order was so inordinately puffed up as to be quite regardless of the wishes or feelings of mere members of the travelling public and "sich-like."

He did not for one moment recognise Ivor Clay, a fact which Ivor Clay on the other hand recognised immediately. The latter was not the sort of man to proclaim himself to a policeman, and failing to impress his identity by any other means, he knew that the man in refusing him access was merely doing his duty.

He smiled therefore a little sarcastically, and merely added:

"I am allowed special use of that staircase—however, it doesn't matter."

The gentleman in the helmet made no remark. He stood very straight and heavy, with his thumbs stuck into his belt and that air of complete detachment from the foolish persistencies of ridiculous humanity which is common to his service all the world over, but which is apt to exercise an exasperating effect upon persons even of the most peaceable tendencies and most unshakeable devotion to the law's prerogative.

Ivor Clay was plainly and uncompromisingly turned back. As forcibly as attitude could say it, the policeman's attitude told him to go about his business. Now Ivor Clay was not in the habit of being turned back—least of all in New Britain—and Ivor Clay did not like it. It was the most trifling misadventure, of course—more ludicrous than anything else—and as such he would himself have been the first to regard it, but for one fact: namely, that it was the arrival of the new governor that had given rise to it. Now fifty viceroys, clothed in all the semi-majesty of semi-regal state, might have forbidden the whole packet service itself to Ivor Clay's use, and Ivor Clay would have only laughed at them heartily; but this one viceroy out of all the roll of viceroys the world over, happened to bear the title of Sithrington, and the word Sithrington was not one that Ivor Clay ever cared to touch him if possible, no doubt because its touch had a sting in it that left a fester behind it. The exponent of the law—as many another greater exponent before him—was guilty of a mistake having further-reaching effects than he wot of when he hustled Ivor Clay back again into the stumbling, jostling crowd.

Ivor Clay went back, but his face was whiter than its wont, and his square jaw looked squarer than usual when he emerged a few minutes later into a street, where the first sight that caught his eye in the near distance was a confused blaze of

scarlet cloth, waving flags, a thin line of red-coated soldiers and a group of brilliant staff-officers drawn up in as good an imitation of a royal reception as the resources of New Britain could accomplish. The military part was, owing to the big garrison, fairly imposing.

Clay's lips parted slightly in a smile, not quite a pleasant one. He waited for a moment, and not seeing any sign of his own carriage, watched, with that small sardonic smile still about his lips, the proceedings in the distance. A very respectable outburst of cheering as well as an unmistakable fluttering movement among a group of frock-coated and tall hatted humanity that Clay could just distinguish standing at the entrance to another part of the harbour leading from a pier where the special steamer had been brought alongside, told him that his Excellency was approaching.

As the cheer went up Ivor Clay turned aside abruptly and deliberately avoided looking in the direction whence every other eye was strained.

Ivor Clay had never seen the present holder of the Earldom of Sithrington, and an impulse difficult to explain, but none the less irresistible, made him shrink from seeing the man as long as it was possible to avoid it.

He stood staring blankly in an opposite direction, and wondering half in vexation why his carriage was not there to meet him, as well as some one to take his luggage, at that moment reposing in the luggage store above the jetty.

He did not know how long he stood there, for his thoughts were more engrossing than agreeable. But all at once a pretty dogcart, very beautifully built and turned out, drawn by a black mare and driven by a tall young man, both equally irreproachable as to grooming, drew up at a swinging sweep beside him.

The driver flung the reins to a dapper groom, who appeared like lightning from behind, and jumped down.

"Hullo, Teddy, my dear fellow," said Ivor Clay, smilingly, "how are you?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the driver of the cart; "I beg ten thousand pardons for keeping you waiting, Chief!"

Clay laughed good-humouredly, shook the younger man's outstretched hand and mounted the trap.

"No," he said, in reply to the other. "You drive, old chap, I'm tired. I'll content myself with looking about me and you can tell me all the news."

The tall young man, who did everything in a determinately languid fashion and whose whole appearance, manner and bearing conveyed the idea that he was almost too smart to live—and that he knew it—swung himself into the driver's seat and gathered up the reins.

"My luggage," said Ivor Clay, mildly.

"Watson," returned his companion, "will be down directly. In fact he ought to be here now. But no doubt the charms of the—ah—procession have allured him. Indeed, you won't suspect my sanity, I hope," he added, as he guided the mare skilfully through the various blocks of traffic in the street, "but I went round to have a look at the 'percession' myself. That asinine little brother-in-law of mine was there in one of the open carriages. Awful little ass! Sithrington's made him private secretary, you know. Decent of Sithrington, but then he's Sithrington's first cousin, and next in for the title, too, by Jove! You should have just seen the consequential look of the little thing! Little? eh! Rather! All the Wynyards are little—never knew a tall Wynyard in my life. Sithrington himself's a pocket edition, but Lally Wynyard's a—what d'ye call those little Johnnies people are so keen on? Elzevirs?—yes: that's him. He married my eldest sister because she was the tallest girl he happened to know at the time. If there'd been a taller one he'd have

married her. Measures the kids once a month and slangs Selina if they ain't putting on yards of height between whiles. He's shaved his moustache, by Jove! and had on a tall hat several sizes too big for him, the only big thing about him. Selina's rig-out must have cost him a pretty penny —and they haven't got many pennies, pretty or otherwise. Jolly decent of Sithrington to put him on the job here. But the little thing's head's clean turned by it, by Jove! To see the airs of him sitting there was enough to make you squirm."

"Lord Sithrington," observed Ivor Clay, "is a small man, you say?"

Teddy Lexham nodded; the mare was fresh, consequently his speech was rather jerked out than uttered consecutively.

"Not seen him yet?"

Ivor Clay made a gesture in the negative.

"Small chap like the rest of 'em. Wynyards are all small."

Ivor Clay stared straight out between the mare's pretty excitable black ears.

Perhaps it occurred to him that there was at least one living refutation of Teddy Lexham's pronouncement very close to that young gentleman at the moment. It may have been some such reflection that brought a curious glimmering smile about his lips.

"Do you know Sithrington?" he enquired, a moment later.

Teddy Lexham raised his eyebrows languidly.

"Met him at my sister's wedding, seven years ago. You know what that means—champagne, imbecile witticisms, polite interchange of absolutely inane felicitations. He was Wynyard's best man. Selina thought that the next best thing to marrying him herself. He nearly split Selina's skull open trying to cut the cake over her head, with a carving knife six yards long. He held the knife, and Buszard's man held him—and we all held our breath. He got the knife in by a

mighty effort—as that novelist Johnny, Rider Haggard, says—Buszard's man got it out again. Selina was saved—for this great day."

Teddy Lexham finished with a slight laugh. Even his laughter, so the young ladies in Mapletown would have told you, was the essence of essential smartness.

Ivor Clay grinned with the utmost appreciation.

"Dear boy," he said, looking at him, "I'm glad to find you are able to amuse yourself with this trifling. I fancied from your last letter that sorrow o'er thy youthful soul had shed something or other—eh?"

The slim young man driving the dogcart shook his head.

"Appearance is deceitful and beauty is vain. My heart, Chief, is very sad."

"Oh," said Ivor Clay, "then there's another."

"Don't be brutal," was the plaintive remark.

"Not for the world," said Ivor Clay, soothingly, "but where is she? and who? She is, let me see, the thirty-ninth since——"

Teddy Lexham tried to look as reproachful as his features would allow. It must be said that they did not allow him to go very far in that direction. But he sighed quite audibly.

"Out with it," said Clay, with another wicked grin.

"I saw her first—three weeks ago. Ever since, I have thought of nothing but a shaft of golden sunshine steeped in tears."

"An April shower, otherwise. Did you lend her your umbrella, the best gamp you owned, Teddy?"

Teddy Lexham closed his eyes. They were in the suburbs of Mapletown now, so that he could do so for a second without danger to life and limb.

"Don't profane her presence with the mention of such word as—gamp."

"All right," said Ivor Clay, serenely, "then I won't."

"I have seen her several times since," pursued his companion. "I am studying her. She is quite precious, totally apart from all other women. I have never loved before——"

"Oh, Lord!" said Ivor Clay.

"I have never loved before," repeated his companion, imperturbably, "with a passion of the soul. This is a passion of the soul." He closed his eyes again.

"Indeed," said Ivor Clay, "glad to hear it. That sort isn't actionable, I believe. Look out! mind the mare. Her passions are not of the soul; more from the heels, I think."

Teddy Lexham opened his eyes with amazing promptitude; and with amazing promptitude too for so soulful a gentleman, he quickly reduced the lady between the shafts to a sense of her situation. That accomplished he resumed:

"I study her. Just now I am getting the effects of her hair. Her hair is a warm brown; *not* red——"

"I never suggested that it was, Teddy."

"—but *wine*-coloured."

"Bless me!" said Ivor Clay. "Port or sherry, my boy? 'Pon my word, I'll have a look at the young woman."

"Oh, don't!" said Teddy Lexham, with pained languor. "Don't. If you knew how you agonise me when you speak of a young woman—a *young* woman. My dear Chief, a young woman is a young woman—and nothing more."

"It strikes me," said Clay, "that I've heard something like that somewhere before, but I don't like to hurt your feelings."

"My feelings!" said his friend. "They've lived for these weeks under red-hot ploughshares. Oh—her hair!"

Ivor Clay cleared his throat irritatingly.

"That colour's apt to be hot, Teddy, old man."

Teddy Lexham shook his head once more.

"You are a man of stone," he said, plaintively.

"All right," said Clay, cheerfully. "Take it easy, Teddy, you'll be better by and by."

"By and by!" repeated the other; "ah, but the illimitable centuries of pain to be lived through first!"

"All right," said Ivor Clay, even more cheerfully.

"You are a man of stone," said the other again. "Have you ever watched the upward sweep of a woman's hair? Have you ever traced the lingering lights and shadows in the coils as they creep upward from the line of the neck, up, up towards the ear? Her ears"—his tone was brisker—"are a perfect symphony. The right ear blushes pinker than the left, but the symphonic concord is not disturbed. Have you ever studied a woman's ear? I have studied many. But in hers I have at last found the true *note*——"

"Bank-note, eh?"

"—of perfect harmony," the speaker finished, composedly.

"And all the others?" asked Ivor Clay, maliciously.

Teddy turned upon him a glance like Hamlet's father, "more in sorrow than in anger."

"Others!" he said; "they were nothing, merely so many steps in the gamut of the soul's passion to lead me up to *the* one realisation——hang that mare!"

For the lady between the shafts, no doubt from a sense of monotony, was trying her best to get from between them and enter upon a freer course of existence in the most expeditious way she could devise.

"Hang that mare!" said Teddy heartily, and straightway left the passion of the soul to take care of itself while he took care of the bodies at that moment contained in the trap.

When this had been satisfactorily accomplished and the mare induced to contemplate existence from a fairly decorous restraint of harness, they

were well out of Mapletown, on their way to Ivor Clay's house and home.

Ivor Clay did not live in Mapletown. When he stayed there he put up at his club. His house was situated about fifteen miles down the coast. He had built it for himself, and it was admitted to be one of the prettiest abodes, both as regards situation and design, in the country.

"Arkwright," said Teddy Lexham, when the contest with the mare left his faculties disengaged once more—and there was a remarkable change of tone observable in his utterance of the word—"is raging and stampeding as usual."

Ivor Clay smiled.

"Poor old Arkwright," the latter said, genially, "he is full of energy and resource!"

"Yes," said Teddy, with his best drawl; "but why the dev-vil make such a distressing noise about it?"

"My dear boy," said Ivor Clay, "we live in New Britain."

He smiled again as Teddy held up the mare rather tightly.

He knew that between Arkwright and Teddy Lexham there would never be a much better understanding than is usually to be found between fire and ice. Yet both men were valuable and both lovable, each in his way, which ways were as far as the poles asunder.

"Came out with a flaming tirade this morning," continued Teddy, "in the *New British Nation*, about unfortunate Sithrington's arrival. All possibly true, but not my form, you know; nor yours, I should say."

Ivor Clay's face clouded.

The *New British Nation* was his property, and Arkwright was his editor and manager. The ownership of the *New British Nation* newspaper was known to only three men in New Britain The three were Ivor Clay himself, the man beside him, and Arkwright. Clay was far too wise to

openly embarrass himself with a weekly political paper, yet he was also shrewd enough to realise that it was a weapon absolutely necessary for him to hold privately in his own hand.

"I'll have a look at it, and a talk with Arkwright," he said, curtly. "The appointment was a scandalous affront to me."

"It was," said the other; "by Jove, yes!"

"All the same," said Ivor Clay, "Arkwright must do his spiriting——"

"According to your orders," struck in Teddy Lexham, concisely, and his air was extraordinarily different from what it had been a few minutes earlier.

"Precisely," said his chief, with equally curt compression.

He turned to his companion, as they bowled along smoothly now, through hedgerows and a still rural, if suburban, neighbourhood.

"Well, old chap," he said, with a change of tone, "you haven't yet asked what messages your mother has sent you."

Teddy Lexham's face flushed for a second.

"Look here," he said, quickly, "how is my mother?"

"Uncommonly well," said Clay, warmly.

Teddy's face brightened with a light that not all the women he had ever made love to would have been able to bring there.

"Hurrah!" he said, lightly. "I never trust letters. But I can trust you like shot. Hope they trotted you out and did you decently at the old shop."

"I never in my life enjoyed any time so much as the days I spent in your father's house, Teddy," said Ivor Clay, and he said it with an air so unmistakable that Teddy looked visibly impressed. And it was not easy to impress Teddy—visibly or otherwise.

"Glad they did you decently," he said, again.

Ivor Clay said nothing. He was staring out

again between the mare's ears. His face was very set. The other man, glancing at him, thought he looked tired. He did not take any notice outwardly. Teddy Lexham seldom gave you to understand that he observed things. That was not his way.

"My father," said Teddy, after a moment, "has undeniably good points." His tone as he uttered this was as purely impersonal as if he were discussing the merits or demerits of the first Napoleon or the wars of Hannibal. "Unfortunately, though I was willing to recognise his good points, he was not equally willing to recognise mine. Under those circumstances I believe that distance, if it didn't exactly lend enchantment to his view of me, would *ameliorate*, as the newspapers say, his extremely acute perception of my few poor human failings."

Ivor Clay laughed.

"My failings," continued the other, with the same languid gravity, "are, I am quite ready to admit, undeniably failings. The Governor wanted me to admit that *his* failings were all virtues. I couldn't. We parted—friends, as the servants say. I recommend the course to all men dealing with parents and guardians. It is the only one consistent with human dignity. When I failed for Sandhurst the Governor said it was because Poole made my clothes, and because I had sixteen pairs of trousers and twenty-two pairs of boots—all told. When I was spun at the Militia prelim' he declared that it was entirely owing to my refusal to get my militia uniform at the Army and Navy stores, and my insisting on employing the only tailor on the surface of the globe who can make a tunic to fit one."

Ivor Clay laughed again, and with an evident comprehension that tickled his companion so immensely that his thin gentlemanly face grew more weary-looking, if possible, than ever.

"I believe," he said, with a drawl of inimitable

perfection, "that my father goes to church still on Sunday morning in a black cutaway coat edged with braid, a yellow waistcoat and purple trousers."

"As well as I remember," said Ivor Clay, grinning, "he came up to Cambridge for May Week rigged out as you so feelingly describe."

Teddy Lexham sighed.

"Don't tell me any more," he said, plaintively.

They drove on a few paces in silence.

"Have you seen your sister yet?" Ivor Clay enquired of his companion presently.

"No," was the reply. "I am waiting to let her cool down. At the present moment she is overwhelming. As to my brother-in-law, the big landau with four horses was scarcely big enough to hold him."

"Wynyard," said Ivor Clay, as if he were thinking of something else, "is next to the title. He was the Admiral's eldest son."

"Just so," returned Teddy, forgetting to be surprised at Clay's knowledge of the matter. "But as to the title, pooh! Sithrington's going to take jolly good care of that. Sithrington's going to get married, you know."

Ivor Clay did not know. Nor, to tell the truth, did he feel the slightest interest in the knowledge.

"Oh, Lord, yes!" said Teddy Lexham, and then he all at once changed the subject, perceiving that it was not one in which his companion was ready even to assume an interest. "Arkwright," he said, after a scarcely perceptible pause, "was awfully delighted when I told him this morning you were coming. He wants to go down to Drumballa to-morrow, but waited to see you first."

Drumballa was the centre of that district in New Britain where fifteen years before Ivor Clay had found gold, in the teeth of the united declaration of most persons who knew the country that gold would never be found there.

"Not a soul in the place but Arkwright and myself knows you are coming to-day," Teddy pro-

ceeded. "I didn't think you wanted a couple of brass bands and a 'demonstration' to meet you."

"The Lord forbid!" said Ivor Clay, piously. "You're a good boy, Teddy. So old Arkwright wants me?" He smiled.

But the young man beside him noted how alert he became on the instant. The set look in his face relaxed at once. He was altogether the man of affairs, of keen interests and absorbing plans. Lexham felt his own nerves brace themselves pleasantly, his own desires suddenly assume a strength and tenacity that during Ivor Clay's absence they had lost somehow; a result that was eminently characteristic of Clay's effect upon those who attached themselves to him.

In contact with him inertia withered—rather, perhaps, it flung off the slough of deadness that enfolds its victims, and the living core in the heart and mind beneath became unexpectedly revealed.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Ivor Clay first came out to New Britain he said a great many things that people there either denied with vehemence or disposed of satisfactorily—as they considered—by contumelious silence. Nevertheless, in the course of comparatively few years, he managed to put these persons considerably in the wrong. They had said that there was no gold in the country. He had asserted that there was. And lo! gold had been found in such quantities as not only to silence the contumelious, but to bring them to the feet of him before whom they were willing to eat humble pie, so long as he retained the power of allotting them shares in the gold mines in whose existence they had refused to believe.

He had also declared, that certain views held by certain sections of the New British people, upon the question of their own existence as a portion of British dominions and the terms of that existence, were not only justifiable, but capable of realisation. Now another large section of New British people as firmly asserted that these were not. Ivor Clay was now determined to prove that he was right and they were wrong, and he had at least come nearer to achieving this than any other man who had ever acted as the pioneer of such views—and many pioneers there had been before him. Now the opponents of Ivor Clay could forgive him for controverting their belief about the existence of gold in the country, for that indisputable contradiction of his had put some of the gold into their pockets; but they could not forgive the possibility

of his being right in his other assertions, because in that case their importance and their privileges would, they believed, be greatly impaired.

There is a parable in an old Book about a strong man armed who lived in security and fatuity until one terrible day a stronger man drove him out pitilessly from his fatuous security. The parable was eminently applicable to Ivor Clay's relations with certain classes in New Britain at that moment. Nevertheless, the march of circumstance, albeit it had gone forward with terrifying rapidity, had not yet made a full end thereof; and so there were not wanting persons who even still, when Ivor Clay made any public assertion—either from himself, or through his party—were not slow in flatly denying that such assertion could ever be made good.

Thus when the special organ of Ivor Clay's party, the *New British Nation* newspaper, hinted that Lord Sithrington's appointment not merely did not approve itself to them, but that the new governor would not recommend himself to any party in the country, a certain section smiled contemptuously and said that the prognostications of the *New British Nation* were on a par with its capacity for fair dealing and unprejudiced impartiality. Nevertheless, it became abundantly clear erelong that the new governor was not making way. Owing to some mysterious and apparently insoluble causes, Lord Sithrington failed to make any headway: first, against the solid phalanx of hostile opinion that his appointment in direct opposition to Ivor Clay's representations created on the one side; and secondly, against the suspicion with which he was regarded by those persons on the other side who persistently upheld the principles—be the same what they might—of the English Government. The first-named regarded Lord Sithrington with aversion, as an English party ruler steeped in certain detested principles; the other looked upon him as, at best, but a lukewarm

upholder of the opinions he was there to represent, and as not unwilling to hold out a friendly hand in alliance with the one person in the country with whom, in their opinion, he had no business to have any fellowship : namely, Ivor Clay.

For the fact was that after many years of doubt and hesitancy the English Government had at last made up its mind as to the attitude to be adopted towards Ivor Clay. It had begun by ignoring him, gone on to ridicule him, and ended by being afraid of him. So the word had gone forth that civility to Ivor Clay was to be the new motto of the Queen's representatives in New Britain. Not ostensibly. Oh, dear no. Even governments scarcely like to stultify themselves—publicly. But all the same Lord Sithrington had got his orders, and his orders were very clear upon the point.

In spite of this new departure, unwelcome to many persons as it was, things might have gone fairly well, and Lord Sithrington might have put in his five years' viceroyalty creditably enough, but for an element in the affair that the English Government could not foresee; namely, the peculiarly personal element that their appointment had for Ivor Clay. The Government could not possibly have been expected to understand this; but then, the Government should not have broken faith with Clay. Governments will do that, we know, and in what follows their blood must be upon their own heads. It generally is.

The first act in the new drama of New British affairs, the ringing up of the curtain so to speak, took place some weeks after the new governor's arrival. The advisers in London were wary—or thought they were—and carefully sought to avoid any appearance of undue precipitancy. But after a sufficiently decorous interval Ivor Clay was suddenly favoured with an invitation to dine at Government House.

When Ivor Clay got that invitation, conveyed to him in due form upon a card of imposing magni-

tude, it would be difficult to explain his feelings. Probably contempt and amusement, or amused contempt largely predominated.

Yet there was also that thin thread of personal intensity of interest that rendered the doings or sayings of Lord Sithrington, or of any member of the Wynyard family, totally different from the doings of any other human being on earth, to Ivor Clay.

It was this thin thread that, thin as it was—almost so fragile and impalpalable as to be nearly invisible even to Clay himself—nevertheless made it impossible for him to refuse the invitation.

If by accepting it Ivor Clay were to risk the possibility of being cast out of the affections of New Britain for ever, he would still have gone to Government House—drawn there by a force as difficult for him to comprehend as it was impossible to him to withstand. But there was little fear of New Britain doing anything of the sort. New Britain was at all events capable of recognising that in Ivor Clay she had met her master, and that if the latter was to conduct her affairs to a successful issue, he had better be left to do it his own way. Moreover, Ivor Clay had unhesitatingly shown them that he would do things as his will and judgment thought best, or he would not do them at all.

The man who conducts his life on such principles will be either a very great success, or a very great failure.

The invitation to Government House was in his eyes exactly apportioned to its true worth. He knew its value to the uttermost farthing. He knew that it was a feeler—a polite if futile attempt to open afresh that political flirtation between the powers that be and the powers that want to be, which has gone on from time immemorial, and will go on, so long as the powers that be are defied by those other powers that are, perhaps, in some countries certainly, still more potent.

Ivor Clay knew this as well as if it had been

written in so many words across the card of invitation. He knew, too, that according to the strict laws of etiquette that govern such matters, he had no right to the invitation, seeing that he had not thought it worth his while to pay his respects to her Majesty's representative on his arrival in New Britain, by writing his name in a book kept for the purpose at Government House. Socially, therefore, Ivor Clay could have, or ought to have, no existence in the eyes of Government House.

Therefore he laughed with considerable and keen amusement when the invitation reached him.

The discriminating advisers at Government House must have found a good deal of gratification in the sense of their own perspicacity when Ivor Clay's acceptance of his Excellency's proffered hospitality duly reached them.

Government House at Mapletown was a big staring edifice that was about as old as the present century. It had all the desolation of the later Georgian era over it. To the eye of the initiated, or the eye of indifferent taste, it was, however, sufficiently imposing; for if it was ugly and bald and cold, there was, at all events, plenty of it.

It occupied somewhat scanty grounds, and a situation which, whatever might have been its advantages at the time the house was built, was not one that would have been chosen at the present time. The centre block of the house was an immense square, and two wings connected by a species of piazza extended beyond it at either side. The garden front opened on a terrace overlooking gardens that were a miniature replica of the far-famed gardens at Versailles, while beyond were a few fields adorned with stumpy trees, and dignified with the title of park. The grand entrance, as it was called, was approached by a courtyard enclosed by an iron railing, and heavy iron gates opened upon the street.

When the Viceregal Court was at Government House a cavalry picket and a small detachment of

infantry were always on duty there. These no doubt added considerably to the royal pretensions of the place, as well as the fashion—not in such a country altogether a matter of form—of the sentry at the gate solemnly interrogating every visitor as to his business within.

The house itself was, according to an ancient fiction, supposed to be furnished for the Queen's representative by the English Government. One holder of the viceregal office who had taken this announcement—as Englishmen take most things—very literally, wrote home after his arrival to say that they had, on an average, three beds to six people, the remnants of what looked as if they had once been carpets, and some chairs that looked as if they had once had springs and cushions, as well as a complete set of portraits of his predecessors in the office. He added that the latter was the only complete set of anything to be found in the house.

When Ivor Clay drove up on the evening which his card of invitation mentioned, the big façade fronting the entrance from the street looked imposing enough. Lights flashed from many of the windows, and the lights in the courtyard sufficiently etherealised the house as to discount in a considerable measure its usually bald ugliness of outline. The mounted sentries, one on either side at the gate, recalled a faint reminiscence of the Horse Guards, while together with the infantry soldiers solemnly pacing to and fro before the hall-door, they imparted a sufficiently fine flavour of royalty to the outside of the establishment. Within the arrangements were what might be expected. Lord Sithrington had been wiser than his predecessor just mentioned, and had not trusted entirely to the resources provided for him by England. He had brought out large quantities of his own furniture, pictures and plate.

Ivor Clay was ushered by very tall servants in powder and state liveries, through the square en-

trance-hall, with its big painted pillars and domed roof and a paved floor of old-fashioned white and black flags in a diamond pattern, into an anteroom which opened into the saloon, as the long drawing-room was called. Here he encountered some three or four persons, who like himself had fancied that the hour named for dinner would be as punctually observed here as in ordinary establishments—for with the exception of these persons (minor members most of them of Mapletown official circles), there was no one else in the room. Not even a solitary member of the viceregal household had as yet put in an appearance. Ivor Clay glanced briefly at the other occupants of the room, to discover that he was not acquainted with any of them. He would have been amused had he been aware of the flutter of astonishment which his appearance in the drawing-room of Government House evoked amongst them. But he was not aware of it. He was, however, very keenly aware at that moment that Government House though this be, he was for the first time in his life under the roof of the Earl of Sithrington. His feelings were very mixed as he reflected upon this—as he thought of himself actually here in the man's house and home! There was the flicker of a smile in his eyes, as they swept over the room a quick comprehensive glance, one in which he saw at once the many improvements that had been carried out. That terrible white and gold which seems to be the only scheme of colouring the official mind is capable of devising, had, he saw, been toned and warmed by the hangings chosen, while some beautiful painted Louis Quinze furniture had been added to the awful chairs and couches—also white and gold—that formed part of the "Government Stock," so to speak, and were repainted regularly by the man who did the garden railings outside. Fine pictures and china helped to make the effect of the whole better still, while the ubiquitous palm was as usual a splendid

resource and filled up odd corners gracefully. It was clear that Lord Sithrington had brought a good deal with him, and amongst the rest he had brought two pictures, which Ivor Clay's eyes no sooner lighted upon than he knew at once they must be the portraits of the Governor's parents. Slowly and deliberately he walked over and stood in front of these two pictures. They were oil paintings, full length, life-size, and had been hung one on either side of a large console mirror that fitted a recess in the wall. Ivor Clay looked at them steadily. For the first time in his life his eyes rested upon his father's face. He studied it attentively. It was not noticeable in any respect. It was neither sensual, nor spiritual, but just the face of one who had been, as Henry Tilson had said of him, neither a particularly good nor a particularly bad man. The features were not at all distinguished, but there were unquestionable indications of kindliness and generosity. There was also more than a tinge of melancholy. The man looked indeed as if he had tasted the wine of life and found it wanting. The portrait itself, the work as it was of one of the first artists of the day, was sufficiently imposing. The subject of it was represented wearing the uniform of her Majesty's Household, (for he had been a lord-in-waiting during a brief administration), while his peer's robes were thrown lightly back from his shoulders and formed a cunningly effective background to his figure—not a very imposing one—giving him height and stateliness.

Ivor Clay gazed at his father's portrait long and steadily. Then he turned to the companion picture—to the portrait of his father's second wife, the woman who had ousted his mother. His lips set themselves very harshly as he turned his eyes upon this canvas. She had not been a beautiful woman, this woman who had been preferred to his mother. Looking at her portrait it was easy to see where her son had got his small aquiline features

and narrow head. She was dressed in the regulation white satin of a bride and wore a tiara and *rivière* of very fine diamonds. The style of dress, fashionable at the time the picture was painted, scarcely lent itself easily to artistic effect; yet the genius of the artist had wonderfully surmounted that difficulty, but with the result indeed, that the whole picture left you with an impression that the subject was hardly worthy of the treatment.

Standing there in front of that picture in an attitude strongly characteristic of him, his head slightly thrown backwards, his broad strong shoulders set very squarely, and that square jaw of his showing every line of dogged determination that his nature possessed, Ivor Clay heard all at once close behind him the soft swish of a woman's silk skirts.

At the sound he turned a little abruptly, to find himself face to face with Susan Romer.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR the moment he was quite dumbfounded. She had been so much in his thoughts since he left England that for the moment he fancied his senses had played him some trick, and that what he saw was the phantom of his imagination and nothing more. But Susan was no phantom, but a charming figure of living flesh and blood; clothed, as Ivor Clay quickly discovered, in the most bewitching frock imaginable to the eyes of man; its filmy draperies of exquisite pale green forming a contrast of maddening fascination to the whiteness of her skin, and the depths of her dark hair.

Her eyes, as they encountered his, looked particularly short-sighted, the lids drooping languidly over the misty radiance of the iris, while her cheeks were flushed to a vivid rose-pink. That she was certainly self-conscious, possibly embarrassed, he might have discovered from those indications in her face, as well as from the way in which a small emerald pendant encircled with a smaller ring of flashing brilliants rose and fell quiveringly upon her bosom. Nevertheless, however conscious or embarrassed she may have been, she was the first to find her voice.

"You see," she said, smiling determinately full into his eyes, "there are I forget how many million inhabitants of this little globe, and so in such a tiny crowd we are always jostling up against each other."

She held out her hand as she spoke. He took it in his own almost mechanically, while his blue eyes with their piercing keenness—and no eyes can be more piercing—searched her face silently.

"I had not the faintest idea," he said, at length, "that you had friends in this country."

"Neither had I," she answered, quickly, "six months ago. I have only just come, and I am staying here," she continued, her voice growing more composed, "here, you know, at Government House"—with a small explanatory nod—"with Lord Sithrington—or"—she laughed softly—"or I should say, with Lord Sithrington's aunt."

"Lady Honoria Mildmay," interposed Ivor Clay, quietly.

"Yes," said his companion, evidently not wondering how it was that Ivor should be so well informed. "This is my first 'function' here," she continued, lightly, "you must tell me who everybody is."

"That," said Ivor, beginning to recover himself, "I am afraid I cannot do. I was going to ask you to give me some enlightenment as to all these people."

They glanced down the room, which was now filling rapidly. Here and there, too, the uniform of the viceregal household heralded—like swallows—the near approach of his Excellency the Governor himself.

"There is my father," said Susan presently, indicating a middle-aged gentleman who wore glasses, and whose grey hair and the front of whose shirt both looked as if they would be the better for being smooth. "He lives upon archæology, you know, and in the hope of some day astonishing the 'Wandering Antiquaries.' Do you know the 'Wandering Antiquaries'? I went to a *soirée* of theirs once at Burlington House. It was quite unique, specially the costumes of the 'Wandering Antiquaries'' wives. My father is very anxious to know you. You won't mind remembering, will you, that the 'Wandering Antiquaries' are very precious, and that without archæology society would be a ravening desert? I do hope he will some day succeed in astonishing the 'Wander-

ing Antiquaries.' I don't see that he has much chance, for they can have no room left for astonishment after the dresses of their wives. Still, I will tell you a secret; it is in the hope of doing this, that my father has come to New Britain."

"I see," said Ivor Clay, smiling. "And you"—he looked at her—"has an equally weighty object brought you to New Britain?" He stopped a little abruptly, wondering why she blushed scarlet at his words.

"I—" she stammered, "I am staying here—you see."

He laughed again with evident lack of suspicion.

"Well, yes," he said, "I do see, but—you must forgive me—your *being* here is so surprising and so totally unexpected that if I ask foolish questions it is really the result of pure astonishment."

A twinkle of fun came into her eyes.

"Your remarks," she said, "are capable of a very sinister interpretation. May I ask if my appearance is so totally at variance with the traditions of Government House, that—?" She ended with a laugh and a comical gesture of deprecation.

Ivor Clay smiled, bowed with mock abasement, and exclaimed:

"The traditions of Government House have never, so far as I know, conferred a single benefit on New Britain until"—he bowed again—"they brought you here."

"What a desperately pretty speech!" said Susan, laughingly; "but it is too bad of you to hurl it at me suddenly. One should have time to prepare a reply."

"Ah," said Ivor, "you have been long enough here, I see, to take a lesson in viceregal methods."

"You are very satirical," said his companion, protestingly.

"I!" he exclaimed. "Oh, surely not."

Susan Romer glanced upward at him a little shyly.

"Tell me—" she said, impulsively, "we are

friends are we not? and no one can know so well as you—how are things going on?"

Ivor Clay looked at her somewhat undecidedly.

"How does *he* get on," she added quickly, a little colour coming into her face.

Ivor Clay laughed a little hardly.

"Do you know, Miss Romer," he said, and his voice was rather cold, "you have asked me a very embarrassing question? Remember where we happen to be at this moment."

Her brows contracted with a slightly perplexed frown.

Something in her face irritated Clay at that moment.

"I am sure," he said, and he was furious with himself when he had said it, "that you are quite as well aware as I am of his Excellency's peculiar fitness for his position."

Susan Romer turned very pale. The sneer was unmistakable.

"Mr. Clay," she said, hurriedly, "I am sorry if I asked you a question I ought not. But—we will not discuss the Governor, please."

Ivor Clay bent his head in assent.

"You see"—her voice was very low indeed, and her eyes were fixed upon the mother-of-pearl sticks of her fan—"he—I—I—Lord Sithrington and I are—going to be married one of these days."

With an effort that actually hurt her flesh, so sharply did she feel the pain of it in the surface nerves under her skin, Susan Romer raised her eyes after she had said this to her companion's face. She never forgot his face, or the look in his eyes as they met hers at that moment.

Involuntarily she made a step nearer to him. It hurt her horribly to think that she was giving any living creature such pain and dismay as she saw reflected in those clear keen eyes which met hers steadily in spite of the reluctant agony in their depths. A pulse of pain seemed to be throbbing through her own eyeballs and beating in her tem-

ples. She averted her eyes for a second, despite all her efforts, and when she looked back again the tension of her heart relaxed as she saw that his face was resuming its normal colour and appearance. The dark flush was dying off it, the look of swollen excitement that really seemed to inflate the flesh was subsiding. A moment more and Ivor Clay had got himself in hand again. But Susan Romer could find no solution for the perplexity that assailed her. Neither then, nor for long after was she afforded any explanation of the terrific effect which her announcement had produced. She could not account at all for the man's extraordinary agitation. When she told him on that day at Cambridge that she was engaged he had, she was well aware, suffered an intense disappointment, but nothing in his manner or his reception of the news then prepared her for the betrayal of feeling which she now witnessed. It was extraordinary, and agonising. Thank God, it was over! She ventured once more to glance at him, and she did not know how appealing, how wistful was the look which her eyes sent to his. But Susan was experiencing that which she had strenuously endeavoured to evade, and up to this had been fairly successful in evading; namely, the conviction that under her circumstances, she should have gone to New Britain as Lord Sithrington's wife, or she should not have gone there at all. The Nemesis of her own foolhardiness was already upon her, she now fully realised, with a horrid little tremor. How to extricate herself from its grasp she knew not. And yet the wish to extricate herself grew very small indeed beside the longing that seized her whole heart to convey to the man beside her some idea of the passion of remorse and pity for the hurt she had unwittingly and in some totally unsuspected way inflicted upon him.

Did she but know it, the appeal in her eyes was quite enough for the generosity which in Ivor Clay

rarely refused any call upon it. The smile with which he returned her glance of piteous entreaty sent the warm blood back to her heart again with a delightful sense of release from a cold grip of apprehension and dismay. So great was the feeling of release that the tremendous force with which Clay was controlling himself in great measure escaped her notice.

"I think," he said, speaking first, and his voice was a little sharpened from the very intensity of its owner's desire to pitch it as naturally as possible, "that if you don't mind—we will——"

The remainder of the sentence either was not uttered or was lost in a sudden movement on the part of everybody in the room. By common consent every person rose from his and her seat.

His Excellency the Governor had entered the room.

And thus it happened that Ivor Clay, standing there with Susan by his side, first beheld his father's legitimate son.

The elder son watched the younger with complete outward composure. In these days Ishmael does not condescend to betray himself to the gaze of Isaac. In this case, too, Isaac was absolutely unaware of the existence of Ishmael. Clay's scrutiny was intense but inscrutable. His face betrayed to the woman at his side just the politely awakened interest that might be expected by the occasion. But all the time he was measuring the man on whom his eyes rested, mentally and physically. The latter was not a remarkable looking man in any one respect, while he was in every respect a complete contrast to the elder son, so close to him at that moment.

Small, slight, somewhat languid of movement and cold in manner, he possessed not one trace of the vigour and virility that made Ivor Clay distinctively noticeable. The resources of an admirable tailor, aided by a valet who must have been a veritable artist in his way, had, it is true, made the

very most of every good point in face and figure. And in his evening dress, with his ribbon and star, he presented an appearance of sufficiently aristocratic type to pass muster easily for the grace and good looks supposed to be peculiar to that type with which, all the same, he was not really endowed.

His face and head, which were narrow and altogether insignificant in outline, did not indicate any degree of special mental capacity, if on the other hand they did not betray any special deficiency in that respect. His small, aquiline features were not noticeable either, the mouth being scarcely concealed by the thin but very cultivated moustache. His five years' service in the Guards had given him a soldierly carriage and bearing that he still retained; but he held himself perhaps aggressively erect, with that almost painful uprightness which many small-sized men and women adopt in the futile effort to diminish their deficiency of inches.

For one second his glance, taking in the whole room, rested upon Susan Romer. No person seeing it would have surmised that she was the woman whom he was going to marry and with whom he was really very much in love. In the same moment it passed on to Ivor Clay. The eyes of the two men—the one conscious of the relationship which placed them so close yet so far apart, the other not—met for a fractional second of time; then separated, the one indifferently, the other with effort.

A certain tensity of silence had fallen upon the company. Susan was conscious of an insane desire to laugh—a desire as much the result of the sudden reaction from the profound emotion of the preceding moments, as from her quick humourous perception of "George" in an extraordinarily novel capacity.

In the silence a voice all at once made itself heard—a thin voice, with a sound of age in it, but with an equally clear sound of resolute deter-

mination not to be conquered by the disabilities of age one moment earlier than was absolutely unavoidable.

Ivor Clay, turning around at the sound of this voice, perceived that it belonged to a lady whose years amply fulfilled the span allotted to mankind by the Hebrew psalmist. This lady had apparently entered the room with the Governor, or closely following, and as his blue eyes fell upon her they encountered the return glance of another pair of blue eyes, between which and his own there was a resemblance that would have been startling to any person recognising it. But, as a matter of fact, nobody, not even Susan Romer there close to them both, did recognise it. The owner of the second pair of blue eyes looked full at Ivor Clay, and Ivor Clay looked full at her. He knew at once that she was his father's eldest sister. She had scarcely glanced at him before she realised that her eldest brother's first-born son was standing before her. Her eyes, perfectly candid and perfectly composed, passed over him, and Ivor Clay did full credit to the imperturbable and inimitable unconsciousness of the look with which she favoured him. He appreciated it with the keener relish, because he knew that this woman had done more than any one else on earth to separate his parents from each other for ever.

Looking at her now for the first time in his life, he saw a little old woman with a wrinkled face; dressed with a perfect realisation of her age, and a consummately clever acknowledgment of it. Her hair, which was very grey, and which had once, it was clear, been unmistakably sandy, was adorned by a small lace head-dress that was neither a cap nor a bow, but something partaking of both. She held herself wonderfully erect, despite her years and her hereditary rheumatism, and her black satin gown trailed quite a yard on the ground behind her and was the more effective in an era of round skirts. Altogether she was a more imposing figure than

her nephew, Lord Sithrington; but Lady Honoria Mildmay had a knack of looking a very great lady indeed, and her diamonds flashed at you in a way that was very overcoming and altogether much more dazzling than other people's diamonds, though as a matter of fact she had comparatively few, and those not of a very superb order.

In her own family she was universally and unequivocally an object of terror. The cry—Honoria be upon thee!—made the stoutest heart among them, man, woman, or child, quail. Her reputation, which was triumphantly established, as they say of novelists and preachers, had been won by a tongue of unerring fluency and a perfect lack of scruple in saying anything that it might occur to her to say of anybody, without the smallest regard for anybody's feelings. She had married in her youth a country gentleman of large estates but small rent-roll, and it is recorded that within ten minutes of the conclusion of the marriage ceremony she had managed to quarrel with him, and that she had never made it up with him to the day of his death. Fate was kind enough to him, however, to permit that day to arrive sooner than it might have been looked for. He died as he had lived, very quietly, and left Lady Honoria in a very bad temper at his unwarrantable interference with her plans in presuming to die just when he did, and with three daughters whom she never forgave for not being three sons. The three daughters she had long since married satisfactorily to three eligible men, who it was whispered had been ordered by Lady Honoria to marry her daughters, and who in sheer terror of her tongue had not been brave enough to disobey its behest.

The affairs of her nephew, Lord Sithrington, now occupied her energies—an occupation that her nephew would have excused; but he was far too well in hand to dream of saying so, and would no more have dreamt of flouting his Aunt Honoria

than he would have dreamt of personally insulting his Sovereign.

Lady Honoria swept her glance away from Ivor Clay, but not before she had made herself fully acquainted with the personality of the man who held a very peculiar interest for her in that he was indubitably her nephew—a fact that she was as indubitably bound to keep to herself. Nevertheless, a certain Rabelaisian humour which she possessed in considerable measure, prompted her to regard him with a good deal of amused favour; because, being the son of "that woman," as she was good enough to designate his mother in her thoughts, he was also the son of her brother, who had never married that son's mother.

Like most women she had a keen relish for a contraband romance, and was willing to pardon Ivor Clay for the unwarrantable presumption of his existence because he unquestionably was the living embodiment of a very contraband romance indeed.

The fact that Ivor Clay had chosen to disdain and ignore the very existence of his father's people, and had carved out for himself by his own unaided exertions a very notable career, by no means lessened her inclination in his favour. For Lady Honoria, like every tyrant, was only to be won by defiance if she was to be won at all.

Her interest was further increased by the knowledge with which Henry Tilson had taken very good care to acquaint her, of Ivor Clay's action with respect to the money which his father had left him. Lady Honoria had a profound regard for money. Nothing that Ivor Clay could have done would have impressed her half so much as his deliberate refusal of three thousand a year. Lady Honoria understood that. She argued from it that the man who could act thus must be either a great fool or a great man. Even at first sight Ivor Clay did not impress her with any indications of foolishness. With these thoughts, or something like them, occupying her mind, she looked now

from the one man to the other—one the son of Love, the other the son of Rank and Influence and Power. There was no doubt at all in Lady Honoria's mind as to how the competitors stood. She could have grinned, if grinning had been permitted on such an occasion. As it was, possibly she grinned in her mind, so to speak.

It was a curious coincidence, but at that moment her thoughts, as her eyes followed her nephew Sithrington, echoed Susan Romer's aspiration. "I wish," said Lady Honoria to herself, discontentedly, "that George was six inches taller; plague take us Wynyards, we are all dwarfs!"

And then it occurred to her that three paces off there stood one Wynyard at least who gave the lie to her very sweeping assertion. "*He* has the height and the brains and the blood," said this outspoken old lady to herself, and then she grinned again behind her wrinkled, satirical old mask of a face, as she added, "they generally have."

Now when Lady Honoria said "he" and "they" her thoughts, it may be added, were not referring to her nephew the Right Honourable George Marmaduke Frederick, Earl of Sithrington.

"*She*," thought Lady Honoria, as she bowed and smiled and accepted the arm of an elderly Mapletown celebrity of high official importance, who had been entrusted with the honour of taking his Excellency's aunt in to dinner, "*she* was a fatuous fool of a thing who fancied she could get the better of *me*. But Lord, she has her revenge in the boy!"

And she of whom Lady Honoria was thinking was certainly not her sister-in-law the late Countess of Sithrington.

The reflections provoked by the sight of Ivor Clay, a few places down at the opposite side of the table, so gratified Lady Honoria's particular sense of humour, that in consequence the important official before mentioned was heard to declare afterwards that "gossip, upon his soul, was an infernal

liar, for that Lady Honoria Mildmay was one of the most agreeable and highly-informed women that it had ever been his good fortune to take in to dinner in the whole course of his life." And as he had spent nearly thirty years in a position of such official splendour as to warrant his taking a select variety of exalted elderly dames in to dinner, his opinion was not to be lightly gainsaid.

Susan Romer, who was still farther from Ivor Clay, nevertheless found herself watching him with an absorption that deprived her escort and even her dinner of the interest due to both.

From whatever cause his agitation had arisen a few minutes previously, he had apparently recovered from it. Even Susan's keen if furtive scrutiny could detect no remaining traces of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

AND yet before dinner ended a slight incident awakened in Susan a fresh sensation of surprise and perplexity.

It was the custom at Government House dinner parties to drink the Queen's health. The toast was given by the governor, who, standing up in his place at the table, raised his glass and said simply, "The Queen," and all present honoured the toast in perfect silence. Immediately following was given "The Governor of New Britain," which was drunk in precisely the same way, except that his Excellency first resumed his seat. The governor sat at the side of the table, exactly in the middle, as in the case of royalty. His wife—when he had one—faced him on the opposite side. Persons of highest rank were placed nearest to his Excellency, and so on down each side to either end of the table, the members of the staff in attendance being farthest away.

The dinner-table on that night on which Ivor Clay first sat at it, was very brilliant. The Sithrington gold plate, which was tolerably famous, had arrived and was in full evidence. Mapletown had the pleasure of eating its dessert off silver-gilt-plates, and of cutting its grapes with a real gold grape scissors off a real gold dish—which was no doubt eminently gratifying to Mapletown, the more so as it was the first time it had undergone the experience. There were persons who declared that so far as the purely artistic effect went, more humble silver produced a prettier contrast with flowers and glass—an opinion that Susan Romer

shared—but such persons were reprehensibly perverse, for there is no doubt whatever that gold is better than silver, and it is nothing less than wonderful how well grapes taste in the mouth that have been taken from a solid gold dish and cut with a solid gold scissors. If any person has any doubts of this, then let him try it.

So everybody present became very agreeable and very suave and astonishingly loyal—for New Britain—after an hour spent at a dinner-table whereupon for their especial use one of the finest private sets of gold plate in the Empire had been set. And so when his Excellency stood up, his glass duly charged, and exclaimed, very gently, "The Queen," why, everybody else rose to their feet, and raised their glasses to their lips and drank in an impressive silence that had a great effect upon the ladies present. Indeed, one lady said afterwards, "that it was quite too perfectly lovely and that she really felt as if she were going to cry."

Susan Romer, as she raised her champagne-glass to her lips, thought it a very pretty custom, while she also thought that no man at the table looked better, or honoured the toast with quieter dignity, than the man whom a good many persons in her Majesty's dominions would have been surprised to have seen there at all.

Then came the second toast, "The Governor of New Britain," and then it was that Susan Romer's moment of perplexity arrived. For, as the charged glasses were again raised to every lip, her eyes once more sought Ivor Clay's fine form—involuntarily and hardly with deliberate consciousness, but rather because as the needle turns to the pole she in his presence felt all her faculties and attention turn to him—and all at once she received a sudden small shock of surprise. Because, as every one else duly honoured the toast, Susan Romer was instantly persuaded that Ivor Clay's glass never touched his lips at all. She was, she knew,

a good way off, and her sight was not to be implicitly depended upon at such a distance ; nevertheless, she could have sworn that the glass did not touch his lips.

The whole thing passed in such a moment, it was over and done in such a flash of time, that there was no possibility of verifying her suspicion. But Susan sat persuaded that for some reason Ivor Clay would not drink the health of the Governor of New Britain. And she experienced rather a pleasing little thrill as the further suspicion occurred to her that it was not the health of the Governor of New Britain that Ivor Clay would not drink, but that of the man whom she, Susan Romer, was pledged to marry.

She was a young woman who liked personal homage, and that went to her heart as a very pretty bit of personal homage indeed, from a very distinguished man to her very undistinguished self.

She was young enough, too, and feminine enough to feel it going to her head likewise, and awaking some of the exhilaration if not the intoxication of champagne. It was in her case the first dash of that power which the meekest of women has never yet been found to disdain.

Susan Romer rose presently from the table with the other ladies, and as she passed out of the room she, in common with the others, swept a profound curtsey to his Excellency before finally leaving the dining-room. All the same, although her obeisance was quite as punctilious as that of any other woman in the room, the little rose pink flush that was in her cheeks and the light that was in her eyes, modestly veiled by their drooping lids, was not brought there by the remembrance that she stood to the Governor of New Britain in a relationship which any other woman in the room, roughly speaking, would have envied cordially.

As she made her demure obeisance to "George" a quiver of humour did part her lips, but all the same it was not the thought of George's glorifica-

tion that had set her heart beating and her cheeks glowing.

The danger-signal was still across the line. Yes, assuredly; only there were other danger-signals of which Susan knew nothing.

Lady Honoria, who had passed so many danger-signals in the course of her life that she had practically ceased to regard them, except, in truth, as indications of an intensified interest in her own affairs, or those of others, walked straight up to as uncompromising a signal as any she had ever encountered a little later in the evening.

"Algernon," said Lady Honoria, when the men came in, "come here."

She addressed a small man, wearing the evening dress of the Household, and he obeyed the summons with an alacrity that showed how well Lady Honoria kept her family in order. She laid her hand on his plum-coloured sleeve and said something to him in low, emphatic accents. He hesitated, looked doubtful, shook his head, and apparently would have disregarded her request or injunction if he had dared; but presently he walked away from her slowly, and it was plain, from Lady Honoria's face as he went, that he had not dared. She looked after him indifferently. He was her nephew, but he was not a person of much importance, and Lady Honoria liked people of importance. If you were a person of importance she would at all events do you the honour to quarrel with you. Algernon Wynyard was not important except for the one trifling circumstance that, as his brother-in-law, Teddy Lexham, had said, he was his cousin, Lord Sithrington's, heir. But even that distinction, such as it was, would no doubt soon depart from him.

Lady Honoria was the only person who called him Algernon. His wife and every one else called him by the name of Lally, for no better reason apparently than that his god-father and god-mother at his baptism had given him the names of Alger-

non Charles, and that fashion has decreed of late that you are to be addressed by some name—the more ridiculous the better—but at all events as entirely different from the Christian name you actually possess as possible. Lady Honoria, however, had been born half a century too soon for these esoteric freaks of modern smart circles, and was never known to address her nephew by any other name than that which his baptismal certificate warranted.

But Mrs. Lally Wynyard, as she liked to be designated by her acquaintances, was nothing if she were not smart. She had even persuaded her husband to sacrifice his moustache at the altar of fashion, a sacrifice that did not improve his looks. But it was better, in his wife's opinion, to be ugly and smart than not to be smart at all.

For the rest Lally Wynyard was a small man, a few years older than his cousin Sithrington, and the general effect of his appearance may be deduced from the fact that at Winchester he had been universally known as "the Weasel."

He walked away now, his aunt's eye following him with a funny glitter in its depths, to where Ivor Clay stood. Approaching the latter, he said something with a smile and a little twirl of his elbows that looked as if he were slightly nervous in so doing. His advances somewhat amused Ivor Clay. This man was his cousin, though the man himself had not the faintest notion of it. For Ivor Clay knew that Lady Honoria and Lady Honoria's brothers and sisters had been very discreet, and that the present generation of Wynyards were in pleasing ignorance of the colourable matter that tinted the doings of some of the previous ones. This man then was his cousin—but he was only his cousin—Ivor Clay could smile at him with mere amusement. He would have smiled more broadly had he known that the little smirking creature before him had come to New Britain as the Governor's private secretary, fully persuaded

that he, Lally Wynyard, would prove himself more than a match for that "pestilent fellow Clay," as he was pleased to designate Ivor.

He meant to begin his operations by unbounded civility. It is so much easier, he believed, to set a trap for your enemy if your enemy doesn't know that he is your enemy—if, on the contrary, he is persuaded that you are his friend.

He stood smirking now, with his little elbows twittering as his hands twitched gracefully in his trouser-pockets, and reflecting meanwhile upon what a devil of a 'cute thing it was of him to have suggested sending that invitation to Ivor Clay. "A devil of a 'cute thing," he repeated to himself, chuckling inwardly. "God bless you, they're all alike, those radical revolutionary financial humbugs! Lime your twig and you have 'em."

And all the time Lady Honoria was watching him and wondering what he meant by keeping *her* waiting, and what in the world nonsense he was talking to Ivor Clay, and what a little whippersnapper he was to be sure, and what a fool the other man must think him!

But Ivor Clay was not thinking much about him. Indeed, it would be difficult to say exactly what he was thinking of. Nor could he have declared his thoughts with any degree of precision himself, as he accompanied his companion through the room to Lady Honoria, who with matchless effrontery had sent her nephew with a message to the effect that she was anxious to make Mr. Ivor Clay's acquaintance, and with instructions to bring the latter to her for that purpose.

"You will think me a very unceremonious old woman, Mr. Clay," she said, coolly turning her back upon her messenger with as plain an intimation as the gesture could convey, that he was to take himself off now that his errand was accomplished, "but I claim the privileges of an old woman. They are not many, it is true"—and she smiled till Ivor Clay could see how excellently her

dentist had treated her—" but one of them is that I may ask to have a young man introduced to me—one, too, of whom I have heard so much."

The unsurpassed callousness of the words, coming from her to the man who knew everything and who was perfectly well aware that she knew everything, might well have stung him into passion. They did sting him truly, but his sense of humour, which had saved him in many a bitter moment before, saved him once more ; for it seemed to him that he was quite unexpectedly thrust into the position of a prominent actor in a comedy framed upon circumstances so intensely ironical and delicately poignant as to rival the finest achievements of the past masters of that art.

Ivor Clay looked at the speaker, as the comedian versed in every nuance of expression and conscious of the footlights before him might have looked, with a clear glance of polite acknowledgment, in which indeed the quality of humour was very excellently subservient, and he bowed with the deference society expects from a man of his age to a woman of Lady Honoria's years and standing.

" You are much too kind," he murmured, and Lady Honoria could have kissed him then and there.

She smiled again, and the diamonds amidst her laces twinkled in glittering points of blue and green and red, like some splendid double star seen through a powerful telescope.

" The world," said Lady Honoria, and Ivor got a fresh glimpse of the dentist's admirable conquest of age and decay, " speaks much of Mr. Ivor Clay, and I cannot affect ignorance of what it tells me about him."

A faint tinge of red rose in Ivor Clay's face. But he awaited his opportunity quietly. It was not the first time in the course of his life that he had done so.

" You have been very many years in this coun-

try," went on the thin, sub-acid accents, "have you not?"

Ivor Clay looked at her.

"Very many," he said, imperturbably. But her imperturbability was quite equal to his.

"You should be able to teach us new-comers many things. I can assure you that you will find us very apt pupils. It would be delightful to learn from one who is so thoroughly master of the subject," and there was a faint emphasis on the word "master," that might have meant anything or nothing.

Lady Honoria paused, looked at him for a second steadily—and there was something in the look that reminded Clay of a cat just going to spring.

"Our motto," she added, sweetly, "for New Britain is kindness. We will kill—the past—with kindness."

Certainly no human being could accuse Lady Honoria's tongue of lack of courage.

"I fear," said Ivor Clay, "that I scarcely comprehend—for I have never yet met with anything able to—ah—kill the past." He paused then, and confronted her.

Lady Honoria had met her match.

CHAPTER XV.

IVOR CLAY left Government House a little later that evening in a dangerous mood. He left it indeed in a condition of mind analogous to nothing in his past life so much as to that in which on a certain memorable day he had left Henry Tilson's offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Now that the strain was removed and he was alone with himself and his thoughts, he realised how fierce had been the ordeal to which he had chosen to subject himself. And yet despite everything, he knew that were it to be done over again, he would have done just the same. He would have gone there. Nay, he knew that he would go there again, if the opportunity were given him.

Government House was public property, the property of the country; every man in the country had a sort of prescriptive right to whatever Government House might have to offer. It was necessary to tell himself this, because he knew that now more than ever, he, personally, could accept nothing from Lord Sithrington individually.

These thoughts had come into his mind as he passed out between the tall iron gates with the mounted soldiers on either side. He was staying in Mapletown that night, so that though he had driven in he had sent his carriage home, intending to walk back to his club, where he always put up. Now, however, he felt that he could not bear the club yet. It was not more than half-past eleven—for the dinners at Government House seldom ran late—and he was not in the mood either for bed or for the idle chatter of the club smoking-room.

He walked briskly, but with a certain restless-

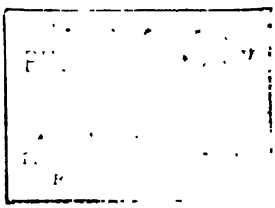
ness upon him, through the streets. The winter's night was dark but only moderately cold. He liked the faint breeze as it blew upon his face. It seemed to clear his brain and still his thoughts.

Once again the poignant soreness and sense of irreparable injury, which the lapse of years and the conduct of his career had in great measure suppressed, arose within him almost as it had arisen when on that summer afternoon so many years before the train had borne him back to Cambridge. Once again—and this time perhaps with added bitterness—the hot fire of resentment that smouldered always deep down in his heart, leaped afresh into a thin tongue of flame.

He had never forgiven—never pretended even to himself that he had forgiven—his father's action; while his feelings toward his father's legitimate son were, if not unforgiving, at any rate resentful. Instinctively he had always felt that with that son he had better not come in contact. Now, in a measure that none could have foreseen, the whirligig of circumstance had in two instances brought that son into conflict with him.

When Sithrington was appointed to the governorship of New Britain, Ivor Clay had every right to resent the appointment, apart from the question of Sithrington's identity at all. And Ivor Clay had resented it and had been justly angry. Nevertheless, mingled with his anger there had been a certain half tolerant contempt for Sithrington personally, a certain generosity which prompted him to let the man have fair play; because, after all, the man was scarcely to be blamed for the accident of birth and parentage. But the second instance in which they had come into direct contact, even direct conflict, was very different from the first. In New Britain Ivor Clay well knew the Earl of Sithrington, were he fifty times the earl, could not supplant him. In New Britain he, Ivor Clay, was the man of real power, of real importance, of real authority. His Excellency the Gov-

"THE FAINT BREEZE SEEMED TO CLEAR HIS BRAIN AND STILL HIS THOUGHTS."
—Page 154.



ernor might play at government and royalty, but the man who owned neither name nor country was the virtual ruler of every acre within the New British boundaries of the Queen's dominions. In New Britain Ivor Clay was perfectly well aware that Lord Sithrington could scarcely hold his office one day longer than he, Ivor Clay, chose to allow him.

But in the second instance—ah, things were different! In the second instance, this man not only had come into conflict with him, but had cruelly supplanted him. Nay, if supplanted were hardly the term to apply, at least his existence had robbed Ivor Clay of the chance of winning the dearest desire that life so far had evoked within him. No wonder that the latent sense of injury sprang up again into a fierce glow of passion.

Why should it be? Why should this brother—this man, the son of the same father, this man who apart from the purely adventitious merit of birth and worldly circumstance, possessed so little in himself to make him worthy of so great a gift as that which he had been able to obtain—why should he be given everything?

Man to man, he, Ivor Clay, was the better of the two. Man to man, he was the superior of the Earl of Sithrington mentally and physically. He knew this perfectly well, with the irresistible realisation of his own capabilities which every man of his type possesses, and he did not affect to deny it even to himself.

In the darkness of the night, as he walked through the deserted streets, he lifted his face upwards determinately, and told himself that the world in these days is a poor place, after all; that it was a better world in the days when a man could strike a blow for the woman he loved. He wanted to go up to Sithrington man to man, and tell him that he must fight for the woman he wanted. Let them meet as men and fight it out between them as men, and to the better man be the prize. In such a contest, he reflected, and his

lips smiled grimly there alone in the semi-darkness, *he* might have little fear as to the result. In that event—yes; but in this event, in this our day which placed him in the grip of a highly complex civilisation, such simplification of complexities cannot be.

And yet, and yet——

He strode on, his footsteps keeping pace with the ringing changes of passion in his heart. It was strange, but true, all the same, that Ivor Clay was reproducing in his own case something of the circumstances of his father's love-story. As in the case of the father, so too it was in the case of the son, untoward circumstances were strengthening and intensifying, not weakening the original attachment. When Susan Romer told Clay that day at Cambridge that she was already betrothed, he had accepted the inevitable with the honourable dignity and self-restraint of a man at once sensitive and self-contained. But he had not, as most men would have done, simply put her out of his thoughts; or, more probably, allowed the separation and the lapse of time to do that for him. On the contrary, she assumed a place in his heart similar in many respects to that which his mother had occupied in his father's after untoward circumstance had put them also asunder. Because, as with the father, so with the son, there was in the heart of each the same tendency to idealise the woman beloved and yet inevitably sundered from his love, the same depth of regard encompassing the latter with a tenderness almost sacred.

How enduring this might have been in the case of the son it would be difficult to say, had Susan Romer become the wife of some man with whom Clay would never have come in contact, and in whom he would have had no especial interest. Probably, perhaps inevitably, this, the first real passion of his life, would have passed away or given place in due course to another brought under different conditions to a happier consummation. But now, as with his father so with him, the par-

ticular turn of events was destined to consolidate that which had been but a very powerful attachment, or rather, perhaps, a very forcible attraction, into the permanency of an absorbing passion.

Yet just then his thoughts dwelt far less upon Susan than upon the man whom Susan was going to marry. He did not think so much of the strength and depth of his love for her, as he exulted with an odd angry exultation in the thought that even now, were he to attempt such a thing, he could, with all his manifest disadvantages, prove himself the favoured suitor. But Ivor Clay knew equally well that to rob a man of his affianced bride is, in the code to which men of honour subscribe, a degree more dastardly than to rob a man of his wedded wife.

He did not for one second even permit himself to think that a man would do such a deed, only he could not get rid of the exultation that whispered that he could, if he would, serve Sithrington thus.

Despite the preoccupation of his mind, he erelong became aware that he had not walked very far. Presently it struck him that he was tired of thinking, that he had had quite enough of it. It was an exercise of which, with him, a little went a long way. And so he presently bethought him that this being Wednesday, he would go down to the office of the *New British Nation*. There he would be sure to find Arkwright; for the *New British Nation* came out on Thursday morning, and in the small hours of Wednesday night Arkwright invariably made up the paper.

Thither, accordingly, Ivor Clay bent his steps. He did not say so to himself, but at that moment there was an unacknowledged wish in his heart for Arkwright's company. He did not say this, because he was too clear-sighted and too uncomfortably honest, even with himself, not to feel constrained to admit that at that particular juncture Arkwright's was not the most prudent companionship that he could have chosen. He said nothing

to himself, he merely went straight to the office. There, as he expected, he found Arkwright—Arkwright of Wednesday night, a terror even to the office dog, and a burden to himself. With Arkwright was a small boy of prematurely sagacious aspect. The small boy was beginning a career in the world of letters as the Mercury of the proof-readers and the editor of the *New British Nation*. At the moment of Ivor Clay's entrance, a sheaf of newspaper slip proofs was passing from Arkwright's hand to that of the small boy. Inadvertently the boy dropped one. He hastily recovered it, while Arkwright, who was naturally a mild-tempered man, but who had habituated himself to the use of certain forms of speech of quite unnecessary violence, cursed the boy with a conscientious completeness that would have done credit to the Hebrew prophets of the old dispensation, or King David in his finest denunciatory moments. He cursed him in his up-rising and his down-sitting; in this world, and in the world to come; in body, soul, and spirit; in food and raiment; in prosperity and adversity; winding up with a cheerful declaration of the pleasure it would afford him, Arkwright, to "to break every bone in his "—the boy's —" ugly body." The boy departed presently with the air of having heard all that before, and no apparent diminution of profoundly world-worn sagacity.

Ivor Clay smiled. As a rule he deprecated Arkwright's conversational methods, but in his present mood it afforded him positive gratification to hear some one declare himself willing to break every bone in some one else's body.

Arkwright, the boy dismissed, looked at his chief.

"Hullo," he said, gruffly, "so you've been putting in your time at some of that infernal tomfoolery at Government House!"

His chief admitted the soft impeachment, while Arkwright meantime went on sorting slips of

printed paper diligently. A greater contrast than the rooms he had just left and that in which he now found himself could scarcely be imagined. Not, indeed, that Arkwright's room in the office of the *New British Nation* need necessarily have been the dingy, dirty, forsaken-looking spot that all the same it undoubtedly was, but merely that it had undeniably stamped upon it the hall mark of Arkwright. Now, if you gave Arkwright Chatsworth, or Windsor Castle, or Blenheim Palace for his own use for forty-eight hours, he would have made either, or any, or all of them look squalid before even half that term should have expired. Teddy Lexham said of Arkwright that he was the Genius of Discomfort—and it was certainly true. Arkwright himself was perfectly unconscious of his peculiarity in these respects, nor could any representation that could be made to him on the subject afford him any enlightenment. At that identical moment Ivor Clay knew that it would be perfectly futile to point out to Arkwright that it is usually considered more convenient and more comfortable to keep your ink-bottle on the table than on the floor; that it is also productive of greater comfort and more satisfactory results to use an ordinary blotting pad, rather than a square inch of tattered blotting paper requiring to be constantly passed over the surface of your foolscap in a succession of vigourous dabs and pats; that if you want to wipe your pen it is better to do so on one of the innumerable penwipers to be easily procured for the purpose, than on portions of your clothing; finally, that it is a saving of time and temper to have an idea of where you have bestowed such minor indispensables as scissors, paste-pot, and blue pencil. Arkwright's way of handling things was, too, as curiously violent as his language—yet he had rather small hands with slender fingers. Nevertheless, so rough was his method, that if he opened a book you expected to see the back of the binding completely broken,

while his facility for tearing and crumpling and generally maltreating the pages could not have been surpassed by a six months old baby just beginning to "take notice." Of all this he was also entirely unconscious. If it were pointed out to him he merely replied: What did it matter? or pointed out to you in return the childishness of finding importance in such manifest trifles. He was quite devoid himself of any artistic or æsthetic sense, and he was a man who regarded attributes as trifling and contemptible which he, Arkwright, did not happen to possess. If he did not see the use of a thing it could have no use. Order, neatness, punctuality, were unknown to him; if you happened to mention their existence and their possible usefulness in human life, he derided your delusion and their futility.

Ivor Clay would have liked to tell him now, that he was tearing the slip proofs with the unnecessary violence with which he grasped them, and dirtying them almost to illegibility by trampling them under his feet, as he stooped from his chair to the floor in order to dip his pen into the ink-bottle—for the blue pencil seemed irretrievably lost—but he knew the man far too well to waste time in any such attempt; he knew the man, his excellencies quite as well as his faults. He knew, too, how to weigh the one against the other, and how far the one atoned for the other.

Suddenly Arkwright threw a slip proof across to him. He watched Ivor Clay's face as he read it. Apparently what he saw in the latter's face pleased him, for he rubbed his hands. As Clay raised his eyes from the printed sheet Arkwright winked at him. It was a cold, saturnine contraction of the eyelid, as far removed from the ordinary geniality of the average wink as it could well be. But then, there was very little geniality about Arkwright.

"I bet you," he said, grimly, "*that'll* put sugar in their tea for 'em—damned set of something or other humbugs. Now, don't tell me that's not

going in; it's going in like shot, and be damned to them!" He added a few words more, with the addition of a good many adjectival redundancies of quite uncalled-for strength. A man of poor conversational powers, he may have thought that such flowers of epithet gave colour and variety to his sentences. Most people could have told him that their repetition was as monotonous as it was totally unnecessary. Poor though he was as a conversationlist, Arkwright could write an uncommonly good newspaper article, and even with preparation make a very fair speech. As a writer, however, he was at his best. The slip proof which Ivor Clay held in his hands now was evidence of the fact. It was a very pungent, very scathing, and, on the whole, very accurate indictment of certain English methods of government as applied in certain instances of England's dependencies generally, and as applied, in particular, to New Britain. The error of taste which the article displayed was a drop from the serene and dignified height of dispassionate discussion from a general standpoint, to a personal and vulgarly vindictive attack upon the representatives of Government in New Britain—the latter, for the nonce, narrowed exclusively to the person of Lord Sithrington.

Ivor Clay read the proof twice, while Arkwright watched him, much as a lioness might watch an outsider handling her cubs, ready to pounce and to rescue should occasion warrant. But the occasion did not warrant just then. Ivor Clay held the slip of paper against his knee for half a minute, his eyes not directed to it, but abstractedly fixed on the opposite wall. Presently he lifted his hand and the long slip fluttered as he held it out towards the other man.

"Let it go in," he said, sharply; "what do I care!"

"In-i-go Jones," said Arkwright delightedly, believing that he was making an original pun; "and be damned to it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THAT was the beginning.

The *New British Nation* came out the next morning, and Ivor Clay said to himself, "What do I care!" Nevertheless, from that moment he took a certain definite departure. From that moment he committed himself to methods cherished, it is true, by Arkwright and his faction, but hitherto discountenanced and held in check by their leader.

Arkwright was triumphant. William Arkwright was one of those men who play a particular part in every public movement and every public cause, be the same political, social, or national, wherever and whenever, the world over, the opportunity is given them. No great movement is without a man of this type, to take a prominent share in it. Men of this type are entirely sincere, generally disinterested, and—within limits—exceedingly valuable to the cause they happen to espouse. Outside those limits, however, they are apt to become highly dangerous.

Arkwright's value Ivor Clay well knew; his power to injure his cause he also knew. Hitherto the centrifugal force of Clay's British common sense had exercised the best and most prudent influence upon Arkwright's unreason; and very rarely was the former's common sense subverted. But it was, all the same, as liable to temporary subversion as that of any other man. There were times and circumstances of course, when Ivor Clay was neither so wise nor so good a man as he was ordinarily. There are in Nature things that exercise a noxious influence over some people and

yet remain perfectly innocuous to others. In like manner there are certain persons who—sometimes by no inherent fault of their own—have a bad effect upon certain other persons when brought into contact with them.

For various reasons any contact with the Sithringtons had the worst possible effect upon Ivor Clay. From first to last, apart altogether from Susan Romer, any incident which recalled even the name of Sithrington to him did him harm. It was answerable for a sort of moral deterioration in him. He was instinctively aware of this himself, yet he was powerless to remedy it. You may say that this was unreasonable, and no doubt it was. But the perfectly reasonable human being has yet to be born.

Contact with Lord Sithrington was driving him now to play the game of public affairs, which for so many years he had played strictly according to rules laid down by his own sense of honour, by Arkwright's lead rather than his own. His rules, for example, would never have allowed that article in the *New British Nation*. To throw mud at an opponent simply because he was an opponent, was not compatible with the principles of the man who had first learned to fight his way and to play his game in the miniature world of an English public school. Nevertheless, there were times now when he could listen to Arkwright's outrageous fulminations even without disgust, sometimes with a near approach to satisfaction.

Arkwright was a man who was absolutely incapable of seeing any side of any cause except his own. In his mind were two dominant convictions—the surpassing righteousness of the cause he had in hand, and the hatefulness of England. His hatred of England was almost pathetic. Certainly it "gave him away" in a manner that he could never be brought to see. It was characteristic of him that he could yet unhesitatingly place the cause he believed in, in the keeping of an Englishman.

But in Ivor Clay Arkwright was shrewd enough to know that there was a combination of qualities which he would look for in vain in his own countrymen, and that if Ivor Clay was willing to devote those qualities to getting for New Britain what he—Arkwright—and his countrymen could not get unassisted for themselves, he was by no means going to prevent him from doing so. Personally he was fond of Ivor, as fond as it was in him to be, and he trusted him. He believed in him firmly, the more so because Clay kept him, as he kept everybody with whom he worked, at a certain distance. He believed in him because he had done things that hitherto every person acquainted with New Britain had said would never be done. He had turned New Britain from a poor country into a rich one. He had found the gold that Arkwright and men like him had vainly tried to persuade others was there, but which they had not been able to get at. He had not hesitated to give the working of those gold mines over to English capitalists, in the teeth of a wild hurricane of New British disapprobation, and with a disregard of local "vested interests" that seemed to the ascendant classes in New Britain as almost diabolical. That New Britain should enrich English capitalists appeared shocking to the persons who only wanted to enrich themselves at the cost of keeping their country hopelessly unable to develop her resources. That English capital would, *quid pro quo*, make ten talents of gold with every one it found, like the servant in the parable, they were incapable of grasping. But in this Ivor Clay got the country with him—the country as represented by men like Arkwright—and New Britain grew rich beyond the hopes of man. When Arkwright saw a man able to do this, he believed. He had gone through hard days too with Clay, and he knew the stuff that was in him. He grumbled, it is true, at some of his chief's methods. But he followed for all that, like a dog that might snarl,

but comes to heel submissively enough at his master's word.

But now there was a change. Hitherto Ivor Clay had been very wary regarding the tone of the press of his party. If it were partisan, it was subject to the limits and restraints which distinguish the English press as a whole and do it infinite credit. The article which Ivor Clay allowed Arkwright to insert now into the *New British Nation* was a blot on the paper, and he knew it. He knew that if any other man had been governor of New Britain except Lord Sithrington, that article would never have gone in with his consent until it had first been subjected to certain emendations.

This knowledge did not make his feelings towards Sithrington any kindlier. It angered him to think that he was constrained to do such things. Like his father before him, Ivor Clay might do an unrighteous thing, but he could not do it without knowing that it was unrighteous.

Meantime the march of events went forward at an increased rate. Each day made it apparent that Lord Sithrington was becoming more and more discredited. Even among the Governor's adherents the murmur of disparagement was heard. It was impossible to say precisely how or why it arose. As a matter of fact, Sithrington was neither better nor worse than any of his predecessors. One and all, the latter had invariably pursued the same line of conduct during their five years' office. Sithrington in his turn was pursuing identically the line in question, yet he failed to satisfy anybody.

No doubt Ivor Clay could, if he would, have given a satisfactory solution of the problem. Possibly he knew as well as Arkwright how easy it is in a country such as New Britain, to give any official a bad name; how easy it is to scatter a little seed of discreditable imputation, even amongst the friends of the man in office. Once, when Ark-

wright had exultingly hinted at something of the sort, Ivor Clay had turned on him.

"Do what you please," he said, contemptuously, "but tell me nothing."

Still, without anything very tangible, it spread. The bacillus of dislike and suspicion was in the air, and the germs grew and multiplied as it is their nature to do.

Yet the farce of good feeling was being played between the Governor and the popular party; in other words, between the Earl of Sithrington and Ivor Clay. So well was it being played on Clay's part that every one at Government House was beginning to dream dreams and see visions of a New Britain in which the wolf and the lamb would lie down together; and Sithrington himself cherished a wild hope of returning to England at the end of his term of office, to tell the tale of his wondrous pacification of a country never within the memory of man satisfied with any form of government submitted to it.

This was what everybody at Government House was thinking of at that moment. Every one, except Susan Romer. To Susan the farce was not so deceptive. She had vague misgivings, the promptings of a woman's curious intuition, that faculty which it is the fashion nowadays to decry, because woman herself has given the word of derision to her own distinctly feminine attributes.

Very soon an occurrence justified Susan's misgivings and showed her unmistakably that her intuition had hit the mark.

Among the many functions which a governor has to endure, to perform, or to participate in, in Mapletown, none was of greater importance—according to Mapletown opinion—or recurred with greater regularity than prize distributions. One of these took place just then. There were special circumstances connected with it that rendered it particularly noticeable and of greater importance than usual. First of all, this special distribution

was the first of its kind that had ever taken place in Mapletown, or in New Britain; secondly, the especial educational object connected with it was one upon which every party in the country was for once united; and to these must be added the further circumstance that it was one of Lord Sithrington's earliest public acts and public appearances since his arrival.

The prizes to be distributed were those won by pupils at a large technical school in the heart of the city. Technical education had just then come into New Britain in a mighty wave—as movements in that country had a way of doing; the waves, on the other hand, had a way of receding with equal rapidity, leaving a remarkably dry shore behind them—and nothing else. At present, however, the technical education wave was full and crested, being ridden too by enthusiastic personages of considerable importance. Technical education, to be brief, was very smart, or perhaps you were likely to account yourself among the smart by taking an interest in it. Therefore society in Mapletown was profoundly interested in teaching the New Britishers how to use their little hands—if not in making pots and pans, at least after the best methods of the technical educator.

All Mapletown, speaking broadly, assembled itself therefore in its hundreds in the new technical schools in Hanover Street, on a certain afternoon, for the purpose, first of all, of being numbered among the smart; and secondly, of seeing his Excellency the Governor distribute the prizes—a duty which the daily press of Mapletown had for a fortnight previously announced with unfailing regularity every morning, his Excellency the Governor had graciously consented to perform. Admittance to witness so much graciousness in the performance of so much arduous duty was by "invitation only." If you have ever been a member of a committee issuing invitations to a popular function, you will know what *that* meant—for the committee.

If such has never been your lot, account yourself happy.

At all events, when the Governor and his viceregal party, befittingly lodged in the viceregal state carriages, and requiring at least twice as many horses to draw them as are now considered necessary to persons not viceregal—to say nothing of 'all the King's horses and all the King's men,' in other words, the mounted escort of soldiers and police that accompanied them—when all this pomp and glory and splendour drew up at the doors in Hanover Street, there was a crowd in its best bonnets inside the building and a crowd with no bonnets to speak of outside, that testified to the importance of technical education and the curiosity that has not ceased, even in these days, to hedge a King.

That was what Susan Romer thought, as she endeavoured to descend from the carriage with the proper air of royalty permitting itself to be 'graciously pleased,' and followed his Excellency and Lady Honoria, in charge of a number of somewhat overheated and excited gentlemen in frock-coats of a more or less antiquated cut, or no cut at all, up the red-carpeted staircase. Between the difficulty of walking upstairs upon a carpet not secured by stair-rods, and the difficulty of trying to look as if she was accustomed to the extraordinarily nervous deference which one old gentleman, whom she had never seen before in her life, was paying her—he even tried to walk backwards in his exuberant loyalty, to Susan's acute terror; for, as she said afterwards, she thought every moment he would trip himself up and fall on his poor dear old head—she was only dimly aware for a moment or two after she reached the room of who else was in it. Moreover, the additional fervour of her companion's manner, and the way in which, when they came in sight of the flower-bedecked platform, she was conducted up more steps and placed in a large red-velvet arm-chair, fronting four or five hundred

people, all staring at her as if they had never seen a well-dressed young woman in their lives before, was not calculated to reassure her. Susan was not used to sitting in red-velvet arm-chairs on platforms in the steady focus of five hundred pairs of eyes. She said afterwards that she felt like a zoölogical specimen preserved in spirits, or an Egyptian mummy unrolled before the vulgar gaze for the first time, or a picture on a screen at a magic lantern exhibition. She tried to catch the eye of the A. D. C. in waiting—a pleasant boy in private life, with an ineradicable predilection for practical jokes—but the haughty abstraction of his viceregal and composed countenance quite daunted and even reproved her. "I remember who *I* am, and who *these* are, if you don't," it seemed to say to her. So Susan gave him up, and gave herself up to the due acquirement of a viceregal demeanour suitable to the exigencies of her condition.

As to George! Susan glanced at George, and she said afterwards that he sat on the extreme edge of his very gilded chair, looking about as happy and comfortable as a maid-of-all-work at one of those curious assemblages so popular nowadays anong certain kind-hearted ladies; where, according to the social rules prevailing, the maid-of-all-work finds herself sitting in the drawing-room and being handed tea and cake by young ladies, who are persuaded that by so doing they are pleasingly explaining to the maid-of-all-work the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and how much more enjoyable a properly consituted maid-of-all-work ought to find sitting in unaccustomed drawing-rooms to walking about outside with her accustomed young man.

As a matter of fact, Lord Sithrington was thinking of his speech. The horrors of that coming speech loomed larger and larger before his shrinking vision, for every passing second brought the dread moment of its delivery nearer.

It was as Susan's eye fixed its regard on Lord

Sithrington's mournful profile, that presently travelling a little further in search of more entertaining food, it encountered Ivor Clay's big square head and alert determined face, a few paces off, just beneath the platform. Beside him was Susan's father, comfortably ensconced in an unobtrusive corner, whence he was surveying the scene with an expression of profoundly speculative interest, his grey hair standing up straighter than ever, and his glasses gleaming archæological passion most amiably. He looked happy; so much so that his daughter said to herself, "He is pondering whether these good people are paleolithic, neolithic, or belong to the flint age, or something, poor dear!" Whereby it will be seen that Susan Romer's own archæological acquirements were scarcely considerable. She did not know until afterwards that it was Ivor Clay's good offices that had secured that particular vantage ground for her father. Mr. Romer, whose one idea was to escape what he called "being gibbeted on that platform," had deliberately lagged behind the rest of the party on their arrival. He was so badly dressed and looked so learned that no human being suspected him of belonging to the viceregal party, and he found himself being carefully roped off by an excited functionary from any presumptuous contact with his future son-in-law.

Ivor Clay, who had declined to carry a long pole with a bit of blue ribbon at the end of it, and form one of the long-poled gentlemen assembled at the door to conduct his Excellency to the platform, shared with Mr. Romer an invincible dislike to the platform itself. There was no man in the room who had done more for the cause of technical education in New Britain than Ivor Clay; but one thing he would not do for it, and that was appear on a platform in company with other adorers of viceregal patronage. He had been persuaded, after much difficulty, to move the first resolution—namely, a vote of thanks to the Governor—because it had

been pointed out to him that he was the person by every law in such matters best fitted to do it; and because, the occasion being admittedly one in which opposite parties were by consent united for a special work in the country's good, it was believed the effect of his undertaking such a resolution would have great effect in England—and they wanted English money. Standing, therefore, in his place close to the platform, but not on it, Ivor Clay had been able to help Susan's father to the comfortable corner that his daughter saw him occupying—a piece of courtesy which Susan's father was not slow to acknowledge; the more graciously, as he looked upon Clay as one of the most interesting men alive; and Mr. Romer, who was singularly devoid of party predilections or prejudices, delighted in interesting people. He would have liked to collect them, just as other persons collected coins, or postage stamps, or curios of any sort, and to have kept them in a museum where he could have studied them to his heart's content.

Meantime, his Excellency the Governor, looking not quite decided whether he ought to sit or stand during the function, gave away the prizes in due order; and no doubt he was sorry when they were all given, for then came his own speech. Now Lord Sithrington was a very estimable English nobleman: but English noblemen, however estimable, are not invariably endowed with the powers of a Demosthenes, or a Cicero, or even a Mr. Gladstone; although it might be assumed that they were, from the persistency with which unfortunate peers are badgered, and persecuted, and cajoled into making speeches on every public occasion that offers itself.

On this occasion Lord Sithrington's private secretary had written out for the Governor a very fair speech, and Lord Sithrington had carefully committed this speech to memory. But Memory has an exceedingly tricksy habit of losing or mis-

laying what has been "committed" to her keeping, and of failing to produce the same just when it is most wanted. Of Lally Wynyard's speech, so carefully committed to Sithrington's memory, Sithrington, when he got upon his feet at the fateful moment, found himself able to recall just three sentences, and these not even consecutive. The three were: "Very great pleasure to come here today"; "branches of education"; and "importance of something or other"—he was not sure what—"at the present day." Three sentences, however excellent, will not make a speech. Lord Sithrington halted and stammered; stood first on one foot and then on the other, as if he were trying a new sort of acrobatic performance for the first time; worried his waistcoat, openly, and his memory, secretly; but he failed hopelessly to get further than "branches of education," which evidently struck him as a highly eloquent phrase, for he repeated it at least ten times. His unhappy private secretary, a few paces off, faced the audience with a composed smile that spoke well for his histrionic capabilities. At the end of ten minutes his Excellency "resumed his seat," as the newspapers said next day, "amid general applause"; the newspapers did not say, however, that his Excellency sat down wishing himself dead, and the ground to open and swallow him up for ever.

A moment later a fresh voice sounded through the room—a strong, mellow, resonant voice, low-pitched, and very natural in its accents.

Susan Romer lifted her scarlet face up once more, and her eyes—which her *fiancé's* speech had driven down-bent into a fixed blind stare at her own muff—were raised again to the light of day. The red flush faded from her face into the rose pink tinge that touched and tinted her cheeks when any pleasurable emotion or excitement swayed her. The speaker stood at the foot of the platform, one foot resting upon the lowest step

leading up to it; his attitude, which was partly facing the room and partly turned to the dais, showed Susan the outlines of his big head, and the line of his square jaw, and the calm, resolute pose of his tall broad figure, erect and firm. Strength, power, and the most absolute composure seemed stamped upon him, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. He was not an orator, but he was an easy, fluent speaker beyond all doubt. Without any trick of gesture, or much emphasis of accent, he said what he had to say, and the saying of it never failed to create an impression; possibly because he did not speak unless he had something to say, and possibly because the personality of the speaker is always so much more inextricably interwoven with the speaker's utterances than nine persons out of ten who listen, understand, or imagine.

Susan Romer found herself regarding Ivor Clay with amazement. Even though she believed she knew him fairly well, his manner of speaking was a surprise to her. Anything more unlike the popular conception of a popular demagogue she could scarcely conceive. Even knowing him as she did, she had yet supposed that his great influence and great charm as a speaker in New Britain lay in his rhetorical appeals to New British ears, always keenly alive to rhetoric. Apparently it consisted in nothing of the kind. His strength seemed to lie in the very calmness and absence of passion or noise, in ironic deliberateness of phrase, in a certain sledge-hammer common-sense appeal to the common sense of his hearers, rather than any impassioned cry to their hearts or their sympathies. The girl watching him, leaned back a little in her chair.

"I might have known," she said, "that he would never be hysterical."

But whatever Susan did, or did not know, one thing was certain; that, until this moment in which she first heard him speak in public, she did

not recognise that in the mellow, resonant voice, with its cultured, well-bred intonations, she was listening to a voice even more familiar to her; the very echo in truth of another voice—the voice of the man she was going to marry. An echo? yes; but one fuller, sweeter, more melodious than the sound echoed. Susan Romer looked beyond the speaker down the long room with its sea of faces, but she was not thinking of the faces just then. She was wondering if any one else in the room had noticed that the tones of Lord Sithrington's voice were nearly identical, and that Lord Sithrington's accent was quite identical, with those of the man now speaking—Ivor Clay.

"I am sure," said Susan Romer, "that father notices it. It will give him an opening for his favourite creed that everybody in England is related to everybody else. He will be all the more positive because, of course, Mr. Clay and the Wynyards cannot possibly be related; and the Wynyards are so fond and proud of the Wynyard voice that they must have a monopoly of it. Nobody is ever allowed to have the Wynyard voice but the Wynyards themselves."

But Susan Romer's attention was very soon recalled from the speaker's voice to the words the voice was uttering.

Ivor Clay was telling his audience something of the history of the present enterprise. What he told scarcely took three dozen words, yet the art of the speaker placed the salient features at once before his hearers. He spoke of what had already been achieved and of what in the future they hoped to achieve. Then he turned swiftly to the more immediate terms of the resolution he had to propose, and at the mere utterance of the phrase, "his Excellency the Governor of New Britain," Susan felt a sudden thrill of anticipation shoot through her. A second later she knew that her intuitive feeling as to how matters stood was right. She looked at Ivor Clay's resolute, inscrutable face as he spoke

of the "deep interest which his Excellency—in this, as in all else since his arrival in this country—has shown in every enterprise beneficial to the country and the people"—of "the benefits, which, we cannot doubt, his Excellency's public identification of his high office with the cause of technical education *could not fail to effect*"—and lastly the "*pleasure* and *instruction* which every one present must"—with the speaker himself—"have derived from the *exhaustive* and *comprehensive* speech which they had just heard from Lord Sithrington. Every one of his Excellency's utterances," Ivor Clay added, with inimitable, imperturbable coolness that did ample credit to his relationship to Lady Honoria, "was an evidence of the extreme attention which his Excellency had given to the subject, and the ability with which he had treated it. He asked them," etc.

Then he sat down.

"I wonder," said Susan Romer to herself, "*why* he hates Sithrington so desperately!"

One other person in the audience could have answered the question, if she had chosen. Lady Honoria was enjoying herself immensely. She, as well as Susan, saw the barbed sneer in every word, the grim parody of the allusions to the Governor's influence, and the Governor's office, and the *abilities* of the man Sithrington. Not a point or a gibe escaped Lady Honoria.

"Upon my word," she said to herself, as she sat in an attitude of admirable attention, "it was like that fool of a woman to die just when she did, and never see such a son as that grow to manhood!"

Susan Romer's father kept them all waiting for him for fully five minutes, so engrossed was he in a conversation with Ivor Clay, and so determined to make the most of his opportunities of forming an acquaintance with so interesting a man.

"I will come and see you if I may," he added, as he came down the steps with Ivor to the car-

riage in which his daughter and Teddy Lexham's sister, Selina Wynyard, were waiting for him.

Ivor Clay expressed the pleasure which such a visit would afford him. But his eyes rested on Susan sitting there in the big open carriage with the Sithrington liveries, and the royal arms on its panels and on the plated harness of the big bay horses. A moment later the big bay horses were whirling the carriage and its occupants away amid the stares of the populace, and Ivor Clay was left standing on the pavement, with the recollection of the look in Susan Romer's dark eyes as they met his for one brief second.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE message of that glance was a message of triumph to Ivor Clay—a triumph so great that even the thought of Sithrington's existence ceased for the moment to vex him. Possibly had Susan been aware of the message which her eyes conveyed to him, she would have carefully averted her glance before it could have conveyed anything of the kind. But she was not aware, and so she drove back to Government House that afternoon, placidly thinking in her own heart that there was no man equal to that one man, quite innocently unconscious that her eyes had announced something of that opinion to the man himself.

Some, not all of it. But enough, at any rate, to bring the colour up into his face as he strode along the streets. Enough to awaken a new prospect before his view. Enough to make life suddenly a thing of romance and tenderness, a thing not merely composed of getting money, or setting other people's opinions right on special subjects—notably the opinions of certain right honourable gentlemen in London upon certain points of policy. Not that he despaired of achieving even this—for Ivor Clay could have despaired of nothing that afternoon—but the thought that crept into his mind, that stole through his veins like intoxication, was the thought that he had approved himself in *her* eyes a better man than Sithrington. He could forgive Sithrington the offence of his existence when he remembered that. Indeed, he was almost glad that Sithrington did exist, since if he did not, the force of the contrast which he had been enabled to put before Susan could not have existed either.

"She is mine," he said to himself exultingly, "mine as she can never be his; no, not if she be ten thousand times his wife." He repeated the words "ten thousand times his wife" over and over again, as if they afforded him some peculiar gratification, though it is difficult to see exactly how Susan could manage to be anybody's wife in that fashion. Yes, she was his. All the highest part of her nature, her intellect, her feeling, her sympathies, belonged to him—Ivor Clay. As to Sithrington, pah! Sithrington might have what was left. And no doubt Ivor Clay thought that was a very handsome share—for Sithrington. His, he said again to himself, his was the better part. That which he desired of her was spiritual. It had nothing to do with anything so poor as love and marriage in the vulgar acceptation of the term. No, he left that to Sithrington. It was just as much as Sithrington and men like him were able to comprehend; it was quite as much as they were worthy to receive.

"I am more to her this moment than *he* is," he repeated to himself; "but Lord Sithrington need not fear, I will not steal his wife from him." This thought carried just then extraordinary satisfaction with it; perhaps because Ivor Clay liked to imagine that were the cases reversed, Sithrington would not have scrupled to steal Susan from him.

There was a more beautiful thing than marriage; there was the union of souls. Ivor Clay was quite sure that a union of souls was all that he wanted between Susan Romer and himself. No doubt he was sincere—for the time.

No doubt too it is compatible with a union of souls to wish to spend as much time as possible in the bodily presence that enshrines the soul.

The latter, however, was none so easy just then. Mundane matters obtruded themselves, as they have a way of doing; affairs far enough apart, goodness knows, from anything so ethereal as a union of souls, but which nevertheless had a very

distinct effect upon the union of souls: because not only did the mundane matters separate Ivor Clay from Susan, but they brought him more or less in contact with the man whom Susan was going to marry, the poor creature who was going to be satisfied with merely marrying her. When Ivor Clay came in contact with Sithrington, he became less happily assured as to the superiority of a union of souls to the mere union of marriage; to look upon the man whom Susan was going to marry and to look upon that marriage with contentment and complacency was not so easy as might be imagined, even with a union of souls to support him.

It was not until the Council met that Ivor Clay came into direct contact with the Governor. New Britain was governed by a council, so-called legislative. The members of the Council were elected by ballot, but the president was the English governor. The legislative quality of the Council consisted in its power to make laws for the country, the parody which the legislative quality really was being seen in the fact that the English Government had the power to veto any law made by the Council—a power they were not slow to use. The English governor, as president, had a good deal in his power; firstly, because the veto was generally conveyed through him; and secondly, because his representations to the English Government had a great deal to do with the fate of the Council's measures.

The Council met twice a year, the sittings extending over several weeks.

The opening of Lord Sithrington's first Council took place a few days after the distribution at the technical schools, and after Ivor Clay's declaration to himself that a union of souls was all that he wanted with Susan Romer.

Ivor Clay was a member of the Council; and at the very first meeting he began to be less certain about the beauties and advantages of a union of souls.

The first council meeting was a sort of mild travesty of the opening of Parliament by the Sovereign at Westminster. The Governor of New Britain came down from Government House to the Council Hall, as it was called, in full state, with a cavalry escort, while a guard of honour was stationed at the gates of the Council Hall. The Governor was attended by certain members of his staff, his private secretary, and the officials of the Council, and he wore court dress. This only happened at the first council meeting of each year. On other occasions the Governor came without so elaborate a retinue, and presided over the meeting in his ordinary costume.

At this first Council Susan Romer looked on from a gallery facing the president's chair of state. Ivor Clay from his place at the long table could see her. He looked at her while Lord Sithrington was reading the Address from the Chair, as it was called. It was supposed to be a summary of leading events and to touch upon such questions as were likely to come before the Council. It was more than this, however, for it voiced the attitude of the English Government towards the measures likely to be undertaken, or considered urgently in need of being inaugurated. Naturally, the address was the signal for hostilities. It was the peg upon which the two parties in the Council hung their undying differences. These differences were not always the same at all times, but varied pleasingly. But the two parties never agreed finally by any chance. Just at that time the burning question was the right of England to insist upon her power of veto. To wipe out the veto was the aim of the party of which Ivor Clay was the leader. The country was perfectly well able, they said, to manage its own affairs. The system of veto was hateful, and inimical to the country's welfare. The answer to this was that too much freedom was not prudent in New Britain; that the demand was only a thinly-veiled device to break with the

mother country altogether; that the true upholders of the country were therefore bound to resist it.

Ivor Clay took up the popular side, but he took it up as no other popular leader had ever exactly taken it up before him. He took it up as a devoted subject of the Queen, as a man desirous of making New Britain powerful and self-sustaining, but all the same a valuable dependency of the British crown.

That was not Arkwright's (ultimate) view, but Arkwright had given himself and such influence as he possessed, body and soul, to Ivor Clay—for the present, at all events.

All the same the Arkwright section was a dangerous tool, which Ivor Clay knew perfectly well. But Arkwright and his section were indispensable to him, which he also knew equally well.

Arkwright was not a member of the Council, but he knew the trend of the questions that came up and the measures put forward. He, too, looked on at this first meeting from a gallery on the side opposite to the one in which the ladies from Government House were seated.

As Lord Sithrington read the address, Arkwright's face grew more and more sardonic. He had not the power which Ivor Clay had of keeping his features entirely under his control. But Arkwright had not the power either of subordinating his own passions to the end which he had in view. Men of his type seldom have; happily for the communities in which they choose to exercise their particular talents.

Ivor Clay had this power in a far greater measure, in every respect indeed except one. He heard the address now with just as full a comprehension of its blandly turned periods as Arkwright, and just as keen a determination to get what he wanted in spite of the prettily veiled intimation that England was not prepared to give it to him. But he was going to do it by methods which would have at least a chance of success—that was all.

He was quite, or nearly, as fond as Arkwright was of the country that had been, as he believed, a refuge to him when England became intolerable, and that had made him a rich man and an independent man, and a man able to hold up his head amongst other men. It was characteristic of him that what he had done for New Britain never obtruded itself upon his view. It was always what New Britain had done for him. He was persuaded, too, that the country had a future. If he were to be the man to secure that future for the country, so much the better. The vision of ascendency, of a tremendous reputation is seldom displeasing to any man.

Sitting at that first Council he found a further incentive to the task, a deep, intense, *personal* incentive such as the whole question had never before presented to him. For it was plain that among his opponents he would have to reckon the English Governor. The address was nothing in the world but Lord Sithrington's utterance, as the mouthpiece of his directors in London, of a determined opposition to the demands of Ivor Clay's party.

Ivor Clay set his teeth under his firmly closed lips and beneath his imperturbable face.

The contest in which he had been engaged for so long had taken an entirely new aspect. Henceforth it would be a duel—a duel *à l'outrance*—between Sithrington and himself.

Sitting there, passion awoke stronger still in Clay. Get the better of Sithrington he must and would, that he was determined upon; yet no person seeing him then would have supposed that the very echoes of the voice of the man standing up at the head of the table reading the address, was like the sting of a noxious insect in Ivor Clay's ear, that it goaded his temper to distraction. Yes, it was to be a duel *à l'outrance* between his Excellency the Governor and the man who had no right even to so much as the name he bore.

With the reading of the address the business of the first Council was practically concluded. The Council then broke up, the members on this day always filing past the chair before leaving the Hall and bowing to his Excellency.

From their several places in the opposite galleries Arkwright, Teddy Lexham, Susan Romer and Lady Honoria watched this ceremony. In his turn they saw Ivor Clay approach the chair. As he did so, they saw Lally Wynyard, who as private secretary was standing close to the Governor, say something quickly to the latter. Ivor Clay walked up slowly, came to a standstill and bowed. Before Clay had time to pass on, Sithrington, they could see, leaned forward from the chair where he remained seated, and addressed some words to Ivor Clay. The words were of course not audible in the galleries, but to the four pairs of eyes watching with equal interest but very varied feelings, it was plain that Sithrington was making overtures intended to be gracious. Ivor Clay, it was equally easy to see, merely listened immovably. In the peculiar grey light of the hall Susan fancied that his face was paler than usual. But he was perfectly composed, more composed than Lord Sithrington, who, Susan knew by the way he jerked his head about as he spoke, was nervous and embarrassed. It was not partiality on Susan's part that made her fancy that most of the dignity was on the side of the man standing up very still and steady in front of the big gilt chair on its raised dais, rather than with the small figure in the elaborate blue and gold uniform and glittering orders that filled the chair.

Arkwright, his eyes glowering as he looked down, gazed first at the one, then at the other.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he muttered, sneeringly, "you pays your money and you takes your choice. *My* money on the man. Dressed dolls are best left to little girls to play with."

But whatever his Excellency had had to say to

Ivor Clay was now concluded. He smiled a little as the concluding words passed his lips, and made a slight movement with his right hand. Whether he actually extended it to Clay none of those who were watching the little scene could have said positively. At any rate, Ivor Clay merely bowed and passed out of the room. Yet the two men in the gallery above turned simultaneously, and the eyes of the two met. Arkwright rubbed his hair up from his forehead with his hand.

"Damned hot in this infernal hole!" said Arkwright, in his usual agreeable way, but with a queer little laugh.

Teddy Lexham raised his eyebrows.

"Likely to be hotter," he returned, curtly.

Lady Honoria and Susan rose from their seats.

"I think," said the former, "we have seen the most interesting part now. Shall we go down and get into the carriage?"

And she smiled as she said it, till all the wicked little wrinkles round the corners of her mouth and eyes looked as if they had gone into convulsions of private mirth at some secret source of amusement.

"*Why*," said Susan Romer to herself once more, "does he hate George?"

But all the same it struck her that she knew the reason perfectly well, and it did not strike her to be angry with the reason—no, not in the very least.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE whole thing is a curious experience," said Susan Romer, smiling, and she looked at Ivor Clay as she said it. Perhaps she thought that nothing in the experience was more curious than that she should be where she was.

She was in Ivor Clay's house—and not only in his house, but here with him in the special room in it where he worked and wrote and read. Her father, true to his intention, had pursued his scheme of acquaintance with Clay, and he had found the latter interesting beyond his expectations. But in the midst of many and not altogether pleasant distractions, Ivor Clay had made time wherein to amuse Susan Romer's father. Susan's father believed that in Clay there were the makings of an archæologist; that if some person, himself for instance, were to give him some instruction, he would turn out very creditably indeed.

The amount of instruction which Ivor seemed willing to accept from Susan's father was remarkable; or it would have been but for circumstances scarcely necessary to relate.

At that particular moment Mr. Romer was walking through the pleasure grounds of Ivor Clay's house, intent upon the history, explanation, and possible origin of one of the curious high mounds peculiar to New Britain. This mound, to which Mr. Romer's archæologically quickened footsteps were now hastening in company with Teddy Lexham, was situated in a corner of Ivor Clay's garden, and was supposed to be a very good specimen of its kind. Mr. Romer, with one eye on the

mound and the other on the "Wandering Antiquaries" and their possible astonishment, was under the impression that his daughter and Ivor Clay were somewhere behind him.

But his daughter and Ivor Clay were in the latter's study; at least they were on the balcony upon which a wide window opened from the same.

The vista that that balcony afforded to Susan's eyes filled her with delight.

Ivor Clay had built his house some miles outside Mapletown. He had built it upon the slope of a hill overlooking the bay; and from where Susan was now, she had a bewitching glimpse of a sweep of sea, and verdant valley, and purple hills. It was a winter landscape—or rather, a landscape with the earliest touch of dawning spring upon its winter garb. But the sea was as smooth as though it were midsummer, and lay softly lambent under a sky of tender blue; for in New Britain you get a day now and then in early spring, or rather, just as winter is going from us, that makes you think that it is a lost day from sweet September that has wandered through the months and found itself at last out of due season.

"It has been a curious experience," Susan repeated; "but do not let us talk of curious experiences. I want to do nothing but look at that." She rested her elbow on the balcony and her chin on the palm of her uplifted hand, according to her favourite habit. "If I lived here," she said quickly, a moment later, "I should be a genius, for I should be inspired." Then her face grew a little crimson, for it struck her that the speech was scarcely prudent under the circumstances. To relieve her embarrassment she stepped into the room again. "Mr. Clay," she said, looking about her, "do you know that you are very, very like somebody I know, in two respects?"

Ivor Clay smiled.

"Am I?" he said, lightly. "But won't you sit down before you explain further? I thought you

would like to have some tea presently, and they will bring it here in a few minutes."

"How perfectly delightful of you to think of it!" said Susan, warmly; "but it seems to me as if we had only just lunched."

"You have a longish drive back," he returned, "and I thought you would probably be late for tea at Government House."

Susan looked at him.

"Mr. Clay," she said again, leaning back in the luxurious chair in which he had asked her to be seated, "why—" She paused. "This is a rocking-chair," she resumed; "how did you guess that I perfectly love a rocking-chair?"

He smiled.

"I think, if I remember, we both agreed that we loved rocking-chairs, one day—do you remember, at Longhaise?"

Her face changed slightly, and a little colour came into it.

"Yes," she replied, rather hastily, "I remember. But"—she leaned her arms upon the arms of the chair and swayed it gently to and fro—"I was going to say that I believe you must have had a very sympathetic mother."

He looked at her.

"Why?" he asked, quietly.

He had remained standing. At the moment he was leaning against the corner of a bookcase that faced the chair Susan was seated in. As she looked at him she thought the dark background of the books was very effective behind his big head with its curiously flaxen hair.

"Because you are so thoughtful in little things. I wonder," she continued, smiling a little, "if you know how thoughtful you are in little things—for a man," she added, with cool emphasis.

He laughed.

"I do not think I have ever thought about it," he said, laughing.

"Ah, possibly not; but it is the case all the

same. It must come to you from your mother: from some *woman* anyhow. More likely to be from your mother than anybody else. I believe very much in the theory of men's mothers. I hope you do."

He did not respond at once. Instead, he turned away rather abruptly, and went to a beautiful old Dutch cabinet of marquetry work that Susan had fallen in love with at first sight. She sat still and watched him as he opened it with a quaint brass key of very elaborate pattern. Within the cabinet Susan saw a small iron safe of the ordinary fire-proof burglar-proof pattern. Clay opened this with another key, and taking out something, advanced again to her chair. He came close to her and she saw in his hand a small blue-velvet case, evidently enclosing a picture. It opened by means of a gold clasp which he unfastened, and Susan saw that it contained an inner case of faded morocco leather. He laid the open case in her hand very gently, but without speaking. She took it in silence also, guessing at once whose portrait the little miniature it revealed must be. For another minute or so there was the same silence. Susan's eyes were bent upon the picture, and his eyes rested on her face.

Presently he spoke.

"That," he said, with a slight expressive movement of the hand, peculiar to him, "is all I possess in this world of my mother."

The girl looked up at him.

"But I was right," she said, quickly; "it is a tender face, sympathetic in a high degree. I am right, am I not?"

"I never knew her," he replied, quickly. "She died at seven-and-twenty of—a broken heart."

Susan turned away her face.

"Oh," she exclaimed, involuntarily, "I am sorry." With a movement that was quite tender, she brushed the glass over the picture with the outer edge of her palm. "A broken heart," she said,

softly. "Yes, but hearts without sympathy do not break."

"So much the more fortunate for their owners," said Ivor Clay, harshly.

She shook her head in dissent.

"It is the rarest distinction that a human being can possess," she said, impressively.

"What?" asked Ivor Clay.

"The capacity for a broken heart. There is nothing so dignified, so uncommon. It is nearly sublime."

Clay smiled a little.

"I hope," he said, "that it is a sublimity which you will escape."

"I!" said Susan Romer, with candid scorn. "Oh, *I* shall escape. It fills me with profound respect and admiration, because it is an honour of humanity unto which I was not born. We are not born to it nowadays, believe me." She shrugged her shoulders. "Bah," she said, contemptuously, "we are very little women now. We are too well educated; we——"

But Ivor Clay, as he looked in her face, saw something perhaps that belied her words.

She stopped in the middle of her diatribe and held out the picture to him; first, however, closing the case carefully and fastening the gold clasp.

"Thank you," she said, earnestly, "for showing me what is so precious to you."

"I have never shown it to any other creature," he said, and his voice was very low.

She looked at him and her lips parted.

And then, all at once, the barriers fell down. The colour rushed into his face. He set his teeth. He stretched out his left hand to her, but she kept hers tightly clasped on the arms of the rocking-chair.

"I know," she whispered, quite hoarsely. "I know, but don't say it. Wait!—listen first to what I have to tell you."

She glanced at him as she spoke. He was

standing very motionless; his eyes gave an unspoken assent to her request. She lowered hers involuntarily, and her voice was a little tremulous.

"Let us suppose," she continued, speaking rather quickly, "that a man, of his own free will—remember that, *entirely* of his own free will—and pleasure, asks a woman to marry him, and she consents. Suppose"—her voice grew quicker and she twisted the gold chain that held her glasses in and out between her fingers—"suppose that a little later, the man sees—some other woman—whom—he—he likes better, and—who—likes him; that then he refuses to marry the woman to whom he is in all honour and good faith pledged. Mr. Clay, what—what does the world, you yourself, say of such a man? What?—what?"

She waited, but he did not speak. He had turned away his head, and his face was not visible.

Susan Romer flung the chain with her glasses from her, so that the glasses clinked against each other, and it was a wonder they did not break.

"You would say that he was a cad and a villain," she said, breathlessly, "and you would be right."

She paused. Still silence. Ivor Clay bit his lip.

"The case is not analogous," he muttered roughly through his clenched teeth; but he did not turn his head.

Susan Romer raised her head.

"Ah," she said, quickly, "of course not, because a man *must* cling to honour and to his pledged word if he is to be a man and not a cur, but a woman is so poor a creature that such virtues of life as honour and honesty are not required of her. The Easterns *say* that women have no conscience and no soul, we in the West *act* upon a precisely similar belief."

Ivor Clay turned round quickly, but she did not suffer him to interrupt her.

"Hear me out," she said, quickly; but as she spoke she blushed, and turned pale, and blushed

again. "I ought not to have come to this country at all," she continued, vehemently, "but—I did not fully realise—it is so hard—for a woman to know—to understand——" She broke off again, but again resumed hurriedly: "We are at a disadvantage which men never realise. That is why so many women consent to marry the first man who asks them. That is why *I* consented."

Unknowingly her voice faltered, but Susan Romer was nothing if she was not honest; her voice might falter, but it could not prevent her uttering even the hardest of sayings for a woman, that her honest heart told her was needful.

"No," she continued in lightened accents, as she met the glance in his blue eyes, "don't imagine that I am a hopeless heroine of romance; oh dear, no! A man asked me to be his wife, and I gave him my promise that I would. But I did it quite freely, quite deliberately, quite with a full consciousness of what I was doing. I liked him very much; I do like him quite as much as ever. He is a gentleman, a man of honour, a good fellow. I was very pleased when he asked me to marry him. Upon my word"—she laughed, for she could always laugh against herself—"I was very proud of myself. No man had ever asked me to marry him before. This man was far from insignificant in the world's eyes, and I don't deny that the fact rendered him more significant in mine. I knew all that he could give me, and I didn't see why I should refuse it. I didn't hate him, as the women always hate a good *parti*—in books; for I was not a woman in a book, I was a woman in the world, and good *partis* in the world are scarce enough to be very admirable indeed when they do appear. I gave him my consent willingly. Think of how much such a marriage could give me that I couldn't by any possibility get for myself. It would give me a world—a real world, with a real part to play in it. It would give me power and opportunity, and every woman

wants both. At all events, I wanted them, do want them. Are you shocked? I am only saying what so many women will not say but what they will act upon. At all events, I didn't pretend anything —to—to—Sithrington. I told him I liked him very much, which was quite true; and that I should be very pleased to marry him, which was equally true. Now—I—will not say—I—cannot—" She raised her head valiantly. "I *promised*," she said, clearly, "and I will perform. I gave my word of my own free will, and I will not take it back—even——" She stood up and walked down the room quickly. "No, no!"—she laughed, but the laughter had a sob in it—"it would be so mean, so *shabby*, and I *hate* shabbiness."

Standing there against the bookcase, Ivor Clay never forgot the picture of her—her dark hair slightly loosened under her hat, her eyes misty and shining, her cheeks very pink.

"I have spoken to you," she resumed quickly, and her voice was a little louder and less steady, "as one woman might speak to another, or one man might speak to another, whom he or she trusted implicitly."

Ivor Clay took a step forward.

"Thank you," he said.

She lifted her head a little higher.

"They say that love is the greatest thing in all human life. It is more! It is the test, for it brings out all that is best—and worst—in a human heart."

"Then," said the man quickly, and he took a further step into the room almost to her side, "love is the one bond—can be, and ought to be but the one bond—between husband and wife. Ah," he cried imploringly, and his face was moved with conflicting passions, "so few men and women know what love really is!"

"It is as rare," said the girl, and her voice shook, "as a broken heart. Perhaps"—her voice shook so that the tones were almost jarring—"when it is greatest and strongest it is so great and

so strong that it must inevitably break the heart that holds it." She saw the response of feeling and agitation in his face. "But," she continued, still walking up and down with the same rapid, impetuous movement, "it is not the whole of life—even for a woman—at least it ought not to be. There is good faith, and honour, and truth. If love does not uphold these, and bring us to these, and bring these out of us, then it is because we have failed at the test, because these things are not in us at all. And anything that calls itself love, and yet comes without these, or makes no value of them, is not love, because it is no true test, but a false pretence which leaves the base metal undetected."

She paused. Looking at him she saw that his grasp had tightened round the case with his mother's portrait, which he still held, so that the impress of his fingers showed on the soft blue velvet.

"I think," she resumed, her voice softening, "that you are not the man to hurt a woman's self-respect or to tempt her to break an honourable promise."

He did not say anything, but standing there with the little picture in his hands, there was in his face a touch of the same expression that Henry Tilson had noticed in it, on the day so many years before when he had placed that same picture in his hands for the first time.

Susan Romer's glance rested upon the blue-velvet case again. Then her eyes met his, and as they did so she knew that it had been given to her to win the rarest prize in life, a great love.

She sat down in the rocking-chair as if she had suddenly grown weak. She did not even raise her eyes when, an instant later, he spoke.

"It has been my luck," he said, with a curious depth in his voice that touched her, "more than once in my life to be very close to some great good, and *just* to miss it." He paused; then resumed: "Now, if I speak one word to you——"

She put out her hand, and her face was white, but her voice was clear.

"You will not speak it."

Ivor Clay laughed a little hardly and the colour rushed into his face.

"Why not?" he cried, with sudden passion. "Why not?"

She raised her eyes to his and her gaze was full and direct.

"Because you *could* not"—and involuntarily her eyes fixed their regard on the little miniature case in his hand—"for honour's sake!"

Some inarticulate exclamation passed his lips, but he crossed the room and replaced the miniature in the safe from which he had taken it. Apparently it did not occur to him to inform Susan Romer that his feelings as an honourable man had impelled him to decline three thousand a year. Nevertheless, it is probable that had the one set of feelings not existed, the other set to which Susan addressed her appeal to-day would not have answered her exactly as they did. He closed the safe and the doors of the outer cabinet.

"It is a quaint key, is it not?" he said, handing the brass key to her as he spoke. "You see how elaborate the wards are, but the lock is very —true."

CHAPTER XIX.

"THIS state of things is intolerable," said his Excellency the Governor. He was pacing up and down the library at Government House when he said it, and his private secretary was his auditor.

The latter was sitting in a Madeira chair, smoking comfortably. The former had a pipe in his hand too, but it had gone out.

"His little game," said the private secretary, "is to drive you out of the country."

"I'll be damned if he does anything of the kind!" exclaimed the Governor, and his eyes flashed.

"Quite right," returned the other, with a reflective pull at his pipe. "Show fight; those sort of chaps never stand up if you show fight."

"Well, upon my honour and soul, the fellow seems perfectly willing to fight me to blazes, and be hanged to him!" said Sithrington, irritably.

"To hang him would be the greatest benefaction that could be conferred upon this country."

The speaker took another long, slow pull at his pipe, yet there was that about him as he spoke that made his school-fellows' nickname of "The Weasel" seem particularly happy.

"Oh, come!" said Lord Sithrington; "you cannot hang a man for his opinions."

"Not so long ago we burnt 'em"—and he looked as if he were quite regretful for the good old times, for which he had by unkind fate been born a couple of centuries too late. "But"—he took his pipe from between his lips—"as we can neither hang nor burn 'em, there is only one thing left for us to do."

The Governor looked at his cousin.

"Buy him," said the latter, and he put his pipe between his lips again.

A small cough made both men start. Looking round they saw Lady Honoria standing beside them.

"Excuse me, my dear George," she said, taking no notice of her other nephew as he rose from his chair, "I came down"—she paused—"am I in the way?" she concluded, sweetly.

"Oh, dear no!" said both men at once; but their voices were not quite so melodious as might have been expected, for they were gentlemen and did not lie easily.

"Then," said Lady Honoria calmly, taking an easy-chair and taking up the conversation with as perfect *aplomb* as if they had invited her to continue it for them, "Algernon"—she looked at the owner of that name as he resumed his seat somewhat crestfallen, and crammed his pipe into his pocket—"was, I imagine, making a suggestion." She paused, the expression of her face guilelessness itself. "Perhaps I should say, a proposition." She arranged the folds of her black moire skirt gracefully. There was nothing apparently irritating in the words, yet they seemed to annoy the gentleman in the Madeira chair unaccountably.

"I said," he exclaimed, curtly, "that if you can neither hang a pestilent prater, nor burn him, nor otherwise gag him, the only course to pursue is to *buy* him."

"Yes," said Lady Honoria; "what an original idea! And then——" She paused and looked at the perpetrator of the original idea. The face of the latter flushed. He was heard to mutter something about women and public matters and the general incapacity of woman's inferior mind. "Very true," observed Lady Honoria, blandly, "very true and *most* original, but not quite pertinent to the matter in hand."

"What *is* the matter in hand, may I ask you?" said her nephew, suddenly forgetting himself.

"Ah, that is not pertinent either, it is *im*pertinent, and—superfluous."

"Lally," said Lord Sithrington, "keep your temper, old man."

There is no exordium known, unhappily, which is less likely to produce the desired effect. The flush in Lal Wynyard's face was scarcely indicative of good results in that direction. But he had the sense not to bandy words further with Lady Honoria.

Moreover the Governor himself rushed into the fray.

"There is a great deal in what Lal says," he observed, impartially.

"Ye-es," said Lady Honoria; "Walpole is generally admitted to have known his world."

Lally Wynyard looked trebly surly at this. When you have been desirous of exhibiting your own knowledge of mankind, it is not pleasing to have another person showing that your knowledge is not your's but another's. It is particularly displeasing if you are of Wynyard's somewhat conceited turn of mind. He sat up in his chair now and looked more like a weasel than ever.

"I know nothing of Walpole," he said snappishly—like a weasel—"but I know that the way to deal with a man—a man—like——" He paused again.

"A gentleman who shall be nameless," interposed Lady Honoria, sweetly.

"—is to ask him how much he will take."

"And if he refuses?"

"*Refuses!*" echoed her nephew.

"For the sake of argument," said Lady Honoria, deprecatingly, "merely for the sake of argument, let me hear what follows *then*."

Wynyard's face looked ugly, so ugly that again Sithrington interposed quickly.

"That's it," he said, walking up and down the room, "hang it, Lal, the man's an English gentleman!"

Lady Honoria, for a wonder, said nothing. She looked from the one nephew to the other.

"I don't know what he is," said the smaller man, (in every sense), and he said it contemptuously. "How do I know what he is, or who he is, or what gutter he swam out of?"

"Nonsense!" said Sithrington, with an irritable laugh. "Don't be a fool, Lal. The man's all right. Hogarth of the Blues told me he was at Harrow with him."

"Indeed!" said the Weasel, with a movement suggestive of a sudden pounce; "and if he was at Harrow with Hogarth what becomes of the romantic story of his early days in this country?—the traditional young man story, poor but honest, with the traditional half-crown in his pocket, eh?"

The Governor laughed.

"Many a man has been at Harrow who's had nothing to eat a few years afterwards. However, all that has nothing to do with it. If the man came here a poor man—I suppose he did—he isn't a poor man now, and he's an Englishman and a gentleman, and—and—I don't like dirty work like that, Lal, upon my soul, I don't!"

"My dear fellow," said the Governor's private secretary, and he smiled and showed his pointed teeth, "remember the greatest good of the greatest number."

"Ah," said Lady Honoria, folding her hands so that the light played on her rings, "now I understand the principles of modern philanthropy."

Lord Sithrington kicked his feet irritably one against the other.

"I'll be shot if I understand anything," he said, despairingly, "except that this country is an uncommonly heavy team to drive."

He turned round as he spoke; his cousin's wife and his own *fiancée* had entered the room. Seeing Lady Honoria, the two ladies, who had hesitated whether to advance or not, came forward.

"I think," said Wynyard, entirely engrossed in

the matter under consideration, "upon my soul, Sithrington, I think you like the man."

"No, I don't," said the Governor, quickly, "I excessively dislike him."

Then said the Weasel: "My way is the way out."

"Dear Lal," murmured his wife, addressing the company in general, "his ideas are always so bright."

"Naturally," said Lady Honoria, also addressing the company in general; "his mother was the grand-daughter of a tallow-chandler."

This was undeniably a somewhat free translation of the fact that the late Admiral Wynyard's wife belonged to a family who had a good deal to do with the sale of tallow. Mrs. Lally Wynyard grew pale and bit her lip. Susan grew pink and bit *her* lip. No, it was seldom wise to break a lance with Lady Honoria.

In the stillness that succeeded the Governor turned with an air of relief to his *fiancée*.

"Come and have a turn in the palm-house, Susan," he said.

She acceded at once and they left the room together. The palm-house, which adjoined Government House at the southwest angle of the garden front, was reached through a corridor. It was an immense house of its kind, forming, as a matter of fact, more than a mere palm-house—a small winter garden.

Arrived there, Sithrington slipped his hand through his *fiancée's* arm, and a good deal of the worried look left his face.

"Let them fight it out between them," he said to Susan. "You and I, my dear little girl, will have a good time here to ourselves in peace and quiet."

"Yes," said Susan; "what are they going to fight out between them?"

"Oh, heaven knows!" said Sithrington, thinking he must be very prudent.

"Possibly; indeed, there can be no doubt *that heaven* knows, but *I* don't."

The Governor of New Britain laughed, and glanced at his companion with an admiration as animated as his countenance allowed of.

"You're a nailer for sharpness, Susan," he said. "I say, those orchids are stunning, ain't they? the spiky, salmon-pinky chaps along there."

Susan barely glanced in the direction indicated by the speaker. Sithrington studied her face as it appeared to him alongside his own. It was quite on a level with his own, though its owner was scarcely a tall woman.

"Susan," said the Governor, and he congratulated himself on his neat averting of state matters, "you are looking the least bit fagged, darling. Now, you were as fit as a fiddle when you first came."

"Was I?" returned the girl indifferently, and she glanced into his eyes. "The climate is relaxing, I think."

"By Jove, yes!" said Sithrington; "I feel it myself." He returned the glance of her eyes. "But I cannot have you knocked up," he said, with a great deal of tenderness.

Susan laughed. "Oh, I'm all right," she said carelessly, but she liked him for the way he had said it, all the same. There were moments when Susan Romer felt very strongly attached to Sithrington indeed. It was unfortunate for him that he so often succeeded in making such moments of no effect.

"That's right," he said, and he pressed her arm closer against him; "when you're all right I'm all right, you see."

Susan looked at him for half a second, then the lids drooped over her eyes again in their characteristic fashion.

"George," she said, presently, "I want to come to a council meeting again, some day."

The Governor looked uncomfortable.

"Darling child," he said, hesitatingly, "they're as dull as possible. Ladies never care a bit about the sort of thing that goes on there."

"I liked it very much and was intensely interested the first day."

"Oh yes, to be sure"—he smiled indulgently—"but we were all uniform and stars and orders and ceremonies and so forth that day; quite a different thing, I assure you. You see, women——"

Susan frowned.

"My dear George," she said, rather languidly, "I see many women, but why drag them in?"

It was at least half a second before he saw it, but when he did he was all the more amused, and all the more delighted with Susan's quickness. He was not a very quick-witted man at the best of times.

"You are a nailer for catching a fellow up, Susan," he said, quite delightedly.

"You see," she proceeded, composedly, "the only way of understanding anything of the state of affairs in this country is to hear the discussions in Council." She glanced again at Sithrington, and there was an eager, interested light in her eyes.

He had recklessly torn off a blossom of the orchids which he described as "the salmon-pinky chaps," and was trying the effect of the exquisite petals against her dark hair.

"George, are you listening?" said the girl.

"I always listen to every word you say," was the response. "My darling, don't bother your little head about what you can't possibly understand."

"Oh, nonsense, dear! Her face shadowed a little. "I suppose I can at least understand as well as Lady Honoria."

The face of the Governor of New Britain assumed an air of great seriousness.

"Aunt Honoria," he said, impressively, "is really a wonderful woman. I declare"—his thoughts reverted to certain episodes—"I don't know what I should do without her."

For a man genuinely in love with the woman beside him, the speech was as singularly tactless a one as his utmost ingenuity could have compassed. But the Governor of New Britain was not ingenious. He never could do much more than state plain facts. This is not always beneficial to either party concerned.

The face of his Excellency's betrothed darkened ominously.

"I am sure I cannot imagine either," she said, very coldly; "but I am glad you are so independent of any help I might try to give you."

"Oh, but I'm not," laughed Sithrington, opening his eyes, "by Jove, no! Wait till we are married, you'll see all you can do for me then. I say, Susan"—he pulled her to him affectionately—"don't I wish we *were* married, that's all!"

Her face lightened just a little.

"And what," she said, with a faint touch of coquetry, "may her Excellency be able to do for his Excellency?"

"Oh, scores of things," he replied, heartily. "Why, look here, I've to give two balls next week"—he smiled ruefully—"if a man doesn't want a wife for all that, why, I don't know what he does want one for."

And the pathetic part of it was that he was quite convinced that he was offering the woman who was to be his wife the highest tribute he could think of at that moment.

"Neither do I," said Susan, curtly.

A brilliant thought had struck Sithrington, so he failed to observe the change of tone in her voice.

"I'll tell you what," he said; "you must get a frock for my big ball, the colour of this orchid." He held the orchid against her cheek lightly. "I never saw any earthly thing suit you so *perfectly* as that shade of pink. Hey! Are they up to doing that in Mapletown?"

"They're up to doing a good deal in Mapletown,"

said Susan, and the laugh which accompanied her words was not altogether pleasant.

Lord Sithrington laughed, and his laughter on the contrary was quite happy.

"Sharp little girl you are," he said, still laughing. "Upon my word they're up to——" Then he remembered that he was the governor, and that Susan was only the woman he had asked to be his wife; he stopped and raised his eyebrows. "Well, well," he said, lightly, "never mind. But get the gown made if you can, darling."

"Oh, yes," said Susan; "I am just fit to be a peg to hang clothes on."

"And a very good peg too," said his Excellency, fatuously.

She did not respond to the compliment. Her eyes were fixed on the feathery foliage of the tall palms as they formed a veritable fan-roof against the glass over their heads; Sithrington, gazing at her happily, noticed that the colour came and went very rapidly in her face.

"Come and sit down," he said, speaking more tenderly. "You do look tired—come." He drew her towards a basket couch with striped cushions close at hand under one of the tall palms. "Come, there's no charge for seats"—and he laughed, not so much at his own small wit, as to relieve a certain tension that even his perceptions led him to apprehend.

Her eyes left the vista of the palm-leaves and rested on his face for a moment. In her own face there was a curious pallour and a still more curious struggle. He did not know all that trembled in the balance during that brief second. She turned then and let him lead her to the seat. He noticed that after she sat down she leaned against the cushions with the abandon of real weariness.

"Are these houses too hot for you?" he asked her, very kindly; "don't stay a moment longer in 'em than you like. They have to keep the temperature pretty well up, you know."

She put out her hand and laid it on his.

"George," she said graciously, and any one who knew her would have observed the marked firmness about the lines of her mouth, "tell me how you'd like that dress made."

"Oh, I don't know," said Sithrington. "I'm no hand at explaining, you know." He was looking about him as he spoke. "I wonder where the thermometer is in this place; do you know whereabouts they keep it?"

"No," said Susan, "never mind the thermometer."

He smiled. But sitting beside her his eye lighted on the tiny enamelled watch which had got turned dial outwards as it hung upon the bodice of her dress.

"Look here, Susan," he said, "is your watch right? Yes? Because I promised Lal Wynyard I'd do some business with him."

"Indeed?" said Susan, but she made no inquiries as to what the business might be. "I will never ask again," she said to herself proudly, but with a certain contraction of the heart, "never!"

"Yes," said Sithrington. "Bother the fellow! I suppose I shall have to go."

Susan Romer stood up.

"Lal," continued Sithrington, as he he passed his hand through her arm again, "is a clever chap."

The girl looked at him with an awakening of interest in her face.

"Humph!" said she.

He laughed, and they walked slowly through the avenue of palms and orchids and poinsettias over the marble floor. At the door leading into the corridor Sithrington said again:

"Lal's a clever chap."

And as he held back the portière to let her pass out Susan Romer responded quietly:

"Too clever, by half, perhaps!"

CHAPTER XX.

AND with those words still ringing in his ear, the Governor of New Britain heard his private secretary announce his intention of asking Ivor Clay to dine with him; and even with Susan's words still echoing the Governor uttered no further remonstrance, and made no inquiry as to the object of such an invitation. Perhaps it was scarcely necessary for him to enquire. Perhaps he knew only too well. When he mentioned it later on to his Aunt Honoria, she smiled. Lady Honoria had several smiles. The one which she now employed was the most alarming of them all, and many of her smiles were very alarming.

"Let him have his way," was what she said, "by all means let him have his way: it will do him good."

When this enigmatical saying was repeated to the Governor's private secretary, it frightened even his self-assurance; for when Lady Honoria told a person to take his, or her, way, it was generally an indication that she felt perfectly satisfied that the way in question was the broad way which we are creditably assured can lead to only one terrible end. Had Susan Romer been consulted, she might possibly have been able to give counsel based upon a larger knowledge of contingencies than even Lady Honoria herself. But Susan was not consulted. Susan, you see, was only a young woman; and Lady Honoria was an old one, and Lady Honoria had a veteran reputation, and a veteran reputation is unassailable.

A week later Ivor Clay sat down to dinner at

Wynyard's table. The Governor's private secretary had a suite of apartments in Government House quite distinct from the viceregal portion of the establishment. Except on state occasions the private secretary did not invariably dine at the viceregal table, but in his own apartments. On this night Ivor Clay dined quite alone with his host. Mrs. Wynyard, the latter was understood to explain, was dining with friends and going to the play afterwards.

Ivor Clay received the explanation with a courteous smile. It merely occurred to him to wonder what was coming next, for that something was coming next he was perfectly well assured. Indeed, Lally Wynyard had sufficient intelligence himself to know that the other man must see through his transparently flimsy device.

So the two men, cousins german, with so much of the same blood flowing in their veins, sat down together. There was a certain similarity between the two. It might have been seen in the absolute perfection with which each kept up the play of small talk while the servants were in the room. During that time the conversation never travelled nearer to questions of the day than it was brought in a discussion on the relative merits of golf and rackets.

Ivor Clay played the latter game first of all because he loved it for its own sake; and secondly, because he loved it with the love which a man feels for anything in which he is finely proficient. Wynyard played golf, because it is the fashion for men of brains and birth to play golf just now. If any other game occupied the same status he would have played it with equal pleasure.

So the conversational game went on swimmingly till the footman had finally left the dining-room in the wake of the butler.

Wynyard, hearing the door close, drew himself up in his chair in a way that amused his guest. Still, though he somewhat conveyed the impres-

sion that the conversation *qua* golf and rackets was getting a trifle threadbare, he did not immediately introduce a fresh subject. Nor did Ivor Clay. He contented himself with waiting to see what the other was waiting for.

The other was waiting for the coffee. At any moment the butler might bring in the coffee.

Lally Wynyard was not going to risk an interruption. He fancied himself a good deal—as they say nowadays—as a diplomat. Hitherto, it must be confessed, the Foreign Office had been so blind to his merits that, till his appointment to Sithrington's staff, the F. O. had allowed him to waste his talents on the desert air of third-rate foreign courts. But great men get their chance, Wynyard always declared. He believed he had got his chance now. He fidgeted over it, whatever it was, more perhaps than it required. But fate, or the butler, was kind to him, for the coffee came in—according to orders—very promptly.

With a cigar in one hand and his coffee-cup in the other, the private secretary to the Governor of New Britain measured the man before him. Perhaps great men are more nervous over the tasks of greatness than their biographers care to allow. At all events Wynyard was very nervous now. But that such a thing was surely impossible, one, looking at his face as he sat there, might have even supposed that he was actually frightened of the man facing him.

The man facing him looked singularly composed. At the precise moment when Wynyard spoke, if the latter could have seen into Clay's mind, he would have discovered that he was dreamily reflecting upon the fact that somewhere on the other side of the walls of that room, Susan Romer must be eating her dinner, or drinking her coffee, at that instant.

But Lally Wynyard could not see into the other man's mind. Moreover, his own reflections were quite enough for him just then.

He set down his coffee-cup with the desperate courage produced by the thought that his own reputation was at stake, and that he must save it anyhow. It is astonishing how large our reputations loom in our own sight. Fortunately for us, perhaps, they seldom assume such gigantic proportions in that of others.

Wynyard's hand was not so steady but that the spoon in the coffee-cup made a sharp rattle as he set it down.

Ivor Clay, aroused by the noise of it from his reverie about Susan, looked up. The eyes of the two men met. Wynyard leaned forward in his chair. Resting his elbows upon the table, and with the still unlighted cigar between his fingers daintily, he jerked his shoulder toward Clay curiously. The first words he spoke seemed to be jerked out of his mouth in the same curious manner.

"Ah, look here, Clay, you'll forgive me, but we're in confidence now. Ah, about that railway of yours."

"Yes," said Ivor quietly, but whether the monosyllable were uttered in assent or interrogation it would be hard to say.

"That railway of yours," said Wynyard again, and he looked long and meaningly—as *he* thought—at Clay.

What the latter thought did not appear, for he said nothing. Perhaps he had nothing to say—yet.

Wynyard jerked his shoulders again.

"We are very anxious here," he continued, with what he believed to be another meaning look, "we are very anxious here, that you should get that railway"—and there was quite a royal sound in the utterance of the portentous "we."

"Indeed," said Ivor Clay.

"Yes," said Ivor Clay's host, but he didn't say it comfortably; perhaps the return monosyllables to his remarks irritated him. "Yes; but, my dear

fellow"—he waved the unlighted cigar airily, as if to show Ivor how very much the latter was his dear fellow—"it's the deuce of an expensive undertaking."

"Yes," said Ivor Clay again, and nothing more.

Wynyard's eyes drew closer to his nose, almost perceptibly. He smiled, and his pointed teeth were so pointed that they looked like fangs.

"I see you understand," he said, graciously; "but we are business men, you and I, and we know that these things can be done."

"What things?" said Ivor Clay.

"Money can be got," said the other, making a bold dash forward now that he had started.

"Assuredly," said Ivor Clay, quietly. "Well?"

"I'll tell you what," said the other, suddenly tacking in sheer fright, "the mines at Drumballa would yield cent. per cent. double, treble what they yield now, if this railway from the North, the railway you contemplate, were working."

Ivor Clay smiled. Mr. Wynyard appeared to be under the impression that he did not know that as well as he did. That being so, Ivor Clay scarcely thought it worth while to speak. So he did not speak.

Lally Wynyard shook his head to and fro, and looked at Ivor Clay as if he loved him and longed to do him a service.

"You'll never get that railway working without help from outside," he said, scornfully; "the capital isn't in the country. You must try outside."

Clay's eyes fixed themselves on the other's face. They looked very light blue, and very piercing at that moment.

"By 'outside,'" he said, "do I understand you to mean England?"

The private secretary to the Governor of New Britain replied briefly that he might so understand.

"I think," said Ivor Clay, quietly, "that I have more than once publicly stated my conviction of England's duty in the matter."

Wynyard screwed up his eyes.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, "'duty' is a very wide term, its interpretation is largely dependent upon the point of view from which it is looked at."

"*Cela va sans dire*," said Ivor Clay, coolly.

His host drank a little wine.

"Meantime," he resumed, clearing his throat, "Drumballa wants a railway to connect it with the North. The construction of such a railway needs capital. Suppose the money at once forthcoming. What will be the result to you?" He looked at Clay and spread out his hands, "*Incalculable!*" He repeated the word after a pause, and paused yet again.

Ivor Clay said nothing. Forced to continue, Wynyard tried a straight rush at the point at which he was aiming.

"The capital," he said, slowly, "is at your disposal if—if you care to accept it."

Ivor Clay raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed," said he, and not another word.

Lal Wynyard's face was a little flushed. He leaned further forward towards Clay, pushing aside his dessert plate with his elbow.

"The future of this country," he said impressively, to the man who was sitting back carelessly, or with apparent carelessness, in his chair, "rests with you." The speaker smiled, as he believed, very frankly. "Now look here"—the smile became confidential as well as frank—"we can't shut our eyes to facts. One fact is your influence here, another is England's determination to govern this country her own way. Now"—the speaker jerked his shoulder again—"why should *your* influence and England's policy not unite?" You are an Englishman and you know your own country, you also know this country. My dear fellow"—he stretched out his hand cordially—"let us be candid. No doubt the estimation in which you are held here is very gratifying and very unique, but

—pray don't understand me to depreciate this country—but England is the best——paymaster."

There was a small slight pause, and his voice altered in the utterance of the word "paymaster." His eyes met Ivor Clay's, but there was apprehension in them. If he expected or feared any remark from the latter he was at fault. Clay said nothing, thus once more forcing the other to proceed. Wynyard emptied his glass, filled it again, and did so.

"My dear Clay, I will not disguise from you that we are very anxious to do our best for this country. For this reason I am speaking to you candidly, candidly"—he said the word twice, rolling it round in his mouth as if to show Ivor Clay the beauty and rarity of it, and the high compliment he paid him in using it—"and to be quite candid we would be glad to come to some settlement—if possible—which would secure us a satisfactory state of things in this country. I may say we are fully sensible of the need of such a state of things."

Ivor Clay's eyes flashed oddly.

"I am glad that you are sensible," he interposed, suddenly.

The other waved his hand.

"Entirely so, I assure you," he said. "And the thing amounts to this: Shall we—that is we on the one side, and you on the other—form a compact?"

"A what?" said Ivor Clay, with the sharpness of a rifle shot.

Wynyard tacked hastily.

"Give us your help, Clay. No man on earth can help us, or this country either, as you can. Even if you do not feel very strongly inclined to help us, think of the country. I believe you to be, though we differ as to methods, a sincere friend to this country. My dear Clay, the country wants all its friends."

Ivor Clay raised himself in his chair. His eyes

fixed the other man's and held him transfixed while he spoke.

"Never mind the country," he said. "Come to the point."

If a shell had exploded at Lally Wynyard's feet he could not have received a more sudden shock of surprise. But the feeling was only momentary.

"Ha-h," he said to himself, "I have him—at last."

"With all my heart," he said aloud. "The thing lies in a nutshell. I am authorised to guarantee you a subsidy for the northern railway, the entire disposal of it to be *practically* in your hands." He paused. "You understand?" he added, looking at the other brazenly.

"Perfectly," said the other. "Let me hear your terms—in full."

Wynyard tried to laugh. It was not a very successful attempt. Though he felt so sure, yet each time Clay spoke it sent an odd feeling down his, Wynyard's, spine.

"Terms?" he said, lightly; "terms?—pshaw! we're not buying and selling."

"No?" said Clay, and Wynyard's spine once more made itself felt.

"Not at all. But I put it before you as a practical man, what do you expect to gain by your present attitude in Council?"

He paused.

"Go on," said Clay, curtly.

"My dear fellow, you know as well as I do that the veto is the only safeguard for public affairs in this country. You know we must protect the country against itself. Now"—he smiled and flung himself back in his chair as if they had reached the conclusion of the whole matter—"we are all friends, and you understand me and I understand you."

Ivor Clay sat up straight and folded his arms across his breast. His face had not changed at all. But any person who knew him well would

have observed that he was very pale. Wynyard observed nothing.

"You say," began Clay, addressing the latter, "that you are 'authorised' in what you have placed before me. I presume you mean that the authorisation comes in the usual channel"—he paused and his eyes grew colder and lighter and more steely—"that is, from the Governor of New Britain."

The Governor's private secretary came to the conclusion at that moment that he was a cleverer man than even he himself had ever before imagined. He looked at Clay and he nodded slowly and impressively.

"Am I correct in my supposition?" said Ivor Clay, and the other might have been struck with his persistence, but that the contemplation of his own talents had for the moment somewhat preoccupied him.

"Perfectly," replied the private secretary to the Governor of New Britain. After all, such a talented man as he was, no doubt knew just what admissions to make with propriety.

Ivor Clay waited for a second before he spoke again, and he leaned back in his chair as if a certain relaxation of body were necessary to him just then. A slight flush had come up into his face, and the veins in his forehead were swollen as they were apt to swell with him in moments of excitement. His voice when he spoke again was curiously pitched.

"Perhaps," he said, "you could give me some idea of the *amount* of the subsidy proposed for—the railway"—and the pause which preceded as well as the accent which emphasised the word "railway" keenly delighted Wynyard the Weasel. The latter, leaning back still more at ease in his chair, named the sum.

Silence. Ivor Clay's eyes were like steel points. Steel with a shining blue glimmer upon its bright surface.

The Weasel looked at his captive.

The Weasel made one more little dart.

"I said," he observed, suavely, "that after all England is the best—paymaster."

"Yes," said Ivor Clay. He pushed back his chair and rose to his full height as he spoke. "Yes"—he looked steadily at the other, his host and his cousin—"that is why she can always command a good supply of men like you ready to do dirty work for her."

With an exclamation that sounded very much like an oath, the diplomatist whose genius, according to his own opinion, had hitherto been so unaccountably overlooked, sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean?" he asked, thickly.

Ivor Clay stared at him straightly.

"Precisely what I have said," he replied, icily.

Wynyard took up a wineglass, dashed it down and smashed it.

"How dare you insult me?" he cried, furiously.

"For exactly the same reasons that you have *dared* to insult *me*." Ivor Clay looked at him steadily and laughed. "No," he continued, "I shouldn't make a noise over it if I were you. You don't want to make this episode public, do you?"

The other's face was nearly purple, and he glared at Clay, but speechlessly.

Ivor Clay looked him over from head to foot as one might look at a toad—a new variety of toad or even a new variety of weasel; then he turned on his heel and walked to the door of the room.

"Tell your employers," he said, and he looked back as he said it over his shoulder, "that the next time they want to do a dirty job, they would show their wisdom by employing an agent less clumsy."

The private secretary to the Governor made a dart at Ivor like a wild animal. But in darting he did not reach to where the other man stood. Perhaps he was not quite brave enough, after all, for that.

Ivor Clay calmly opened the door.

"Good-night," he said, as calmly and very audibly. "We shall meet to-morrow in Council."

Wynyard, standing arrested midway in the room, put his hand to his collar, as if the pressure of it choked him.

"Then you—won't?" he had the astounding temerity to exclaim.

The man whose hand already rested upon the handle of the door faced round.

"*I!*"

The word was like a clarion note as it rang through the room. Ivor Clay's hands clenched themselves down by his side till the nails of his fingers dug into the palms. Wynyard's throat had the narrowest escape at that moment that it had ever had in its life.

Standing thus for one instant longer the two men faced one another. The lips of the one were tightly shut; those of the other slightly parted, the lower lip hanging down limply.

An onlooker might have counted one, two, three —and as he counted might have seen the smaller man falter and slowly retreat backwards a pace or two.

Before he could have counted another stroke of time the door had closed behind Ivor Clay. Wynyard was alone—and safe.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWELVE hours later the wintry sunshine pouring into the Council Hall saw the members assembled.

It was a full meeting, for that year the meetings were of special interest. The country was agitated curiously, and men who knew what they were saying whispered to each other that in the near future the country was not likely to be less so. Many causes were at work. But the primary one underlying all others was that in New Britain periodic agitations of the public mind were apt to occur. Most people in New Britain—and even the minister at home in London who was chiefly responsible for New British affairs—were persuaded that one of these periodic agitations was at hand.

The history of New Britain might, as some one had said, have been merely the account of the rise, progress, and decline of such disturbances from time to time. That this would have a leader, none doubted; that it actually *had* a leader, many were already assured. That that leader was Ivor Clay, was the opinion almost universal.

Almost, but not entirely, for up to the present Ivor Clay, although he had from the first identified himself with the views and aims of a certain party, had yet scarcely identified himself with them completely. But he knew as well as any other man that the time was coming when he would be called upon to do so. He had not watched the course of events in New Britain during the years of his sojourn there for nothing. He had not played his part in the great development of the

country commercially, which his own discovery of a rich plateau of gold had brought about, for nothing. It had all shown him plainly the larger *rôle* which was open to him to take. No man on earth was less willing to take that *rôle*. It appealed to elements in his character which the peculiar circumstances of his life had left particularly susceptible to an appeal of the kind. Under no circumstances would he have ever been the devotee, or even the adherent of hidebound tradition, either in the social or political order. His nature was too fresh, too full-blooded, too energetic for that, even if he had been tied and bound by the chains of hereditary rank. As it was, everything outside tended the other way. He had no family traditions to respect, no family relationships to defer to. He was absolutely and entirely free from such restraining circumstances.

On the other hand, he had to urge him his resentment against much in the conventions that are the bulwarks of social conditions among civilised peoples. This resentment burnt low at most times, because the man's nature was generous and even-tempered rather than vindictive and irritable; but it never quite became extinguished. The spark was always there; it needed only a puff of wind to fan it into a flame.

For England, he told himself often enough, he need have no great love. He owed her institutions no debt of gratitude, while on the other hand it was to an Englishman he owed the bitterest injury of his existence. England was not even the land of his birth, or the nation of his mother. England had no place for him and such as him in her social system. He had not enriched himself at her hands; he was free indeed of all obligations to her. And yet the law of Nature is stronger than the conventions of Man, and the "blood that is the life" is the true dynamic force in a man's being, and so Ivor Clay was an Englishman far more than he himself suspected or would have

acknowledged. But whether he acknowledged or suspected it, the seed of his nationality bore fruit in his career—in the clear common sense which had distinguished it; in his power to keep himself as a rule well in hand, and free from the absolute dominion of unbridled passion; in his respect for certain outward forms; in his industry; in his doggedness of purpose, courage of temper, and sheer inability to know when he was beaten. It has been said that as the child lives for the first seven years of its life, so will the man or woman fundamentally be to the end of life. For three times seven years from the opening of his life Ivor Clay had lived an English boy and man. The impress of those years was indelible. Indelible it would remain, however subsequently obscured or shadowed, as the writing on the original scroll will remain, invisible but existent, under a palimpsest that hides but does not destroy.

As a matter of fact, he had achieved what he had in New Britain, because he had brought to its affairs just the qualities which its people lacked, and among such none had been more marked than his power to restrain himself in order to accomplish the end in view. Hitherto this had been his best safeguard as well as the keynote of his actions. But of late another element had come in. Out of the past, and out of circumstances presumably long since passed away, yet the results of which were still actively present, Ivor Clay was losing the power to restrain himself, and the clear, solid, sledge-hammer common sense that had hitherto been his safeguard and his pivot of action. was—for the time at all events—subverted by a passion that lay at the very core of his being.

Without any inkling, of course, as to the real cause of it, friends and foes alike were conscious that of late he was allowing himself a latitude that he had not hitherto taken. In Council, for example, there was a truculent note in his speeches, and a bitterness in his attitude towards others that

had never before been observable in him. Hitherto his strongest weapon had been his unfailing good temper. If he had differed from the English policy, and if he had defied and defeated it so far as possible when necessary, he had yet done it from a sincere and patent conviction of the advantage to New Britain in so doing, rather than from a desire to make himself disagreeable to the powers that be. Now it almost would appear that he differed and defied for the mere pleasure of doing so. The spirit in which he approached the deliberations in Council and the temper in which he took part in them were strangely unlike those which had formerly characterised him. None of those present understood how much the presence of the Governor had to do with this change. No one as yet noticed the strange duel that was being fought before their eyes by these two men. On the other hand, however, it was plain enough to all present, from day to day, that the air of the Council Hall was heavy with some unrecognisable element, just as in the physical atmosphere an indefinable weight of magnetic force precedes a storm.

From some such causes as these an unusually large muster of councillors awaited the entrance of his Excellency on this particular morning.

It was the rule in New Britain that the arrival and departure of the Governor began and ended the council meeting. It was also the rule that members desiring to take part in the meeting should be in the Council Hall before his Excellency had taken the chair. After the Governor had taken the chair no member was admitted. A peculiarity also noticeable was that which permitted the Governor alone of any man in the room to keep his hat on.

Punctually to the time appointed his Excellency walked in. He was attended, according to custom, by his private secretary and the two permanent registrars of the Council. As he ascended the steps of the chair, which was raised so that it

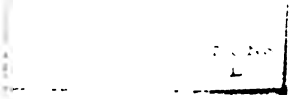
formed a sort of throne, and took his seat, a quick-sighted observer might have seen his eyes travel over the faces of those present till they rested on the face and form of one member whose personality was as easily distinguishable from the rest as his individuality placed him in the forefront of his fellow-members.

That quick, searching glance at Ivor Clay had become a habit of which Sithrington was himself scarcely aware—but it indicated how very largely the council meetings represented in Sithrington's eyes contact with this one man—and each time that Sithrington's eyes had sent that glance, which carried at once a message and a challenge with it, the same eyes had an instant later, as it were, snatched the glance back again, as if convinced of the futility of their errand. For, let the business before the Council be what it might, there was never a point apparently upon which the President and this one member could ever come together in perfect accord. Between them both there was an almost incredible antagonism—incredible to those who, like Lord Sithrington himself, did not know that it sprang up from the most profound, implacable, and unconquerable of all antagonisms, that which exists between persons closely akin.

The business of the Council proceeded without delay. A shaft of pale sunshine lighted up Ivor Clay's face, revealing lines not usually noticeable in a countenance that had retained the *verve* and freshness of youth to a remarkable degree. Perhaps to-day it was the tenseness of the close-shaven lips that had drawn out so visibly the lines in question.

During the earlier part of the deliberations Clay said little. Unusually little for him, for his interest in the business was always like his interest in everything he undertook, keen and eager. Nevertheless, those who opposed him were not reassured by his silence. They had found Ivor Clay's silence often more dangerous than his speech.

"IVOR CLAY STOOD UP, FOLDED HIS ARMS AND LOOKED AT THE PRESIDENT."
—*Page 221.*



Presently, however, an item affecting him very closely came up for settlement. Perhaps he had held himself in reserve for it; at all events, he knew that it was bound to form part of that meeting's business. With a certain accession of nervousness always apparent when the business in hand concerned Clay closely, the President brought forward the matter; and once again, as he did so, his eyes glanced at the man who on ordinary occasions was the most prominent and active member among them all, but who to-day seemed to hold himself aloof in a reserve as sullen perhaps as merely reticent. Ivor Clay was leaning back in his seat, his arms folded across his breast, his face very still and set: its expression not easy, by any means, to read.

Lord Sithrington, some papers fluttering a good deal under his touch, spoke, as was customary, on the matter first.

"The opening of the new branch mine at Drumballa, gentlemen," he said, "and the consequent settlement of local interests and claims by Government as represented by the Council of New Britain, is before us to-day. The scheme for doing so, based upon investigations I have every reason to suppose trustworthy, and upon which the opinion of eminent lawyers here has been taken, is I think an equitable one. It is that your Council guarantee one-fourth towards the necessary payments consequent on buying out local owners of property, and the company itself the remaining three-fourths, the one-fourth guaranteed by your Council to be covered by a small increase in the cess tax of the Drumballa district."

His Excellency paused. Every eye instinctively turned towards Ivor Clay as the chairman of the existing company, and the member of Council above all others who conducted such questions on such occasions.

Ivor Clay stood up, folded his arms a little more closely and looked at the President.

"I understand your Excellency to propose an increase of taxation upon a district, already, because of its dawning prosperity, over-taxed in proportion to the rest of the country." He paused. "I protest against such a proposal. I, for one, will not consent to make such an order in Council on any account."

More than one member looked surprised. Still, it was generally felt among Clay's friends that in the business of the mines he knew what he was about. Among those who opposed him a similar opinion, restricted to be sure in certain points, still on the whole had gained ground.

They all wanted dividends, so they held their peace.

The Governor looked perplexed.

"I was assured," he said in a voice cold, but at the same time consciously striving to be conciliatory, "that the means proposed would not be contrary to the wishes of Mr. Clay and the other directors."

Ivor Clay raised his eyes again to the man above him in the big red and gold chair.

"Your Excellency's sources of assurance," he said, distinctly, "are not to be relied on."

Something of a thrill ran through most of those present. It was not so much the words as a certain indefinable tone in their utterance that gave them a curious significance.

Under the brim of his silk hat Sithrington's face flushed faintly.

"I regret," he said, and his voice was frostily cold now and had a peculiar "ring" in it, "if I have been subjected to misrepresentation."

Ivor Clay smiled, and those who saw the smile, again felt a fresh thrill not altogether pleasant stir their pulses.

"The matter seems to me," pursued the Governor, "at all events imperative. For, it appears to me, the interests of the owners of property in the district, as well as of the shareholders, are dis-

tinctly at a disadvantage, owing to the matter being in an unsettled state. Perhaps"—he looked at Ivor Clay again—"Mr. Clay will permit me to say that so far as I am concerned I feel very strongly the necessity and the justice of making some such settlement as has been put before you. I cannot pretend that my knowledge of the country is at all equal to—to that of Mr. Clay, but so far as it goes, I hold the proposal you have just heard to be a feasible and an equitable one."

Ivor Clay lifted his eyes yet once more to the chair.

"Your Excellency has already heard my decision," he said, curtly. "I oppose it."

The Governor moved his hands impatiently.

"Perhaps Mr. Clay would favour us with a more explicit statement of his objections," he said, slowly. The etiquette required that the Governor should address the members collectively, never individually; speaking, not to the member actually addressed, but of him in the third person.

Ivor Clay passed his hand over his hair, pushing back the heavy fall of the lock that still hung thickly over his forehead as in his boyhood.

"I have done so," he said "already."

Lord Sithrington, looking baffled, tried another argument.

"I think," he said, "that possibly Mr. Clay has not taken into consideration the objection which might be made were the taxation distributed over the whole of the country; namely, that persons would object to pay for what only applied to a special district—that is so, is it not?" He appealed to a prominent official on his right hand.

"Quite so, your Excellency," was the reply.

Ivor Clay spoke again.

"I happen to know that it would not," he said, briefly.

The other members stirred curiously, yet no one interposed. From the very first there seemed to be a tacit assumption that the Governor and

Clay must on occasions like these be left to reckon each with the other solely.

Lord Sithrington flung himself back in his chair.

Ivor Clay watching him continued:

"I happen to know, and am able to inform your Excellency that the wishes of the country"—he slightly emphasised the word "country"—"are not in favour of unequally burdening that portion of it from which its wealth—any wealth it has—is mainly derived. I can quite understand that it is pleasing to certain classes here in the capital and elsewhere, to throw the burden on those out of whom presently they will, all the same, demand a heavy dividend on such investments as they may have, but to talk of those classes and their"—he paused—"their cupidity," he added boldly, and his eyes strangely enough sought the face of his Excellency's private secretary, "as representing *anything—except* their own cupidity—is sheer absurdity. Perhaps"—he smiled, sheeringly—"I may be allowed to add that it illustrates the extraordinary misapprehension that seems to exist with regard to affairs in this country in the minds of those who have undertaken the government of it"—and for the second time Ivor Clay's eyes sought the face of the Governor's private secretary.

With a quick gesture very foreign to his usual languidness of movement, Sithrington sat forward in the chair.

"Mr. Clay," he said, speaking quickly too, and as his arms rested on the arms of the chair his fingers played restlessly with a scrap of paper in his hand, "has of course every possible right as a member of this Council to record his objections to any and *every* proposal"—other members smiled—"put before the Council, but I must ask him in so doing to give those who differ from him, at all events the credit of a sincere desire to benefit New Britain by their proposals."

Ivor Clay folded his arms again with a certain grim determination in the action, and those near

him could have seen that as his right hand lay uppermost on his left arm, the fingers of it were pressed into the sleeve of his coat with curious intensity.

"Your Excellency will permit me to say," he returned clearly, and he had never spoken in that hall with greater deliberation, "that I have no belief whatever in any proposal emanating from the chair of this Council."

He paused.

Lord Sithrington, contrary to or suddenly oblivious of the etiquette of the occasion, stood up. His face was a dull red colour.

"Do I understand Mr. Clay to openly declare his unbelief in the integrity of my endeavours for this country's welfare, my *personal* integrity in the matter?"

"Yes!"

The vibrating echoes of Ivor Clay's voice as it pronounced the one distinct word died into a silence the like of which had never within the memory of man fallen upon that Council Hall, and in the midst of that silence wherein, so strained was the tenseness of its utter stillness, a pin had it dropped would have actually startled those assembled by the noise of its fall—in the midst of this, the two men stood face to face. Eye to eye each steadily met the glance of the other, and in the attitude of both there was a certain similarity that brought out for the moment a likeness each to the other that did not actually exist in physical form. They stood up, brothers, the sons of one man, and the bond of blood had never justified its claim to be something stronger than anything else in human life than at that moment.

No one in the whole assembly spoke. It was as if something had gripped the throats of those present and paralysed their tongues.

The faces of the two standing upright in the midst of all the others were white to the lips. But

the face of the Governor's private secretary, although nobody noticed it, was livid.

Lord Sithrington, still standing, was the first to break the silence which lasted for a space that no man present could have determined. Very pale, but with a gesture familiar to them all, he turned to the official of the Council at his right hand, and addressed him:

"Sir," he said very quietly, but his voice shook, and indeed his whole frame was in a tremor, though his attitude and bearing were so resolute that none suspected it, "it is my duty to declare this Council postponed until to-morrow at the usual time and place of meeting." The words were the ordinary formula of dismissal, not another syllable.

Bowing right and left to the members, in conformity to custom, his Excellency the Governor then left the Council Hall.

It was felt even by those who were never at any time adherents of the Governor, or particular admirers of his, that he had saved the situation and his own dignity, and had risen to the stress of the occasion in a manner that those knowing him hitherto might have hardly expected.

Nevertheless, Ivor Clay was the hero of the incident, for a man in Clay's position is expected to take bold steps—the bolder the better. Friends and foes alike expect that. That a rupture of some kind was imminent no member who had attended the council meetings during the previous weeks doubted. It had been merely a question of how far Ivor Clay would dare to go. Now he had dared to go far beyond fondest expectation—so far indeed that one immediate result of his action was that others felt themselves all at once braced by his action to exceeding great daring. So true is it that mankind are as sheep.

As to Clay himself, he walked out of the Council Hall with a strong tide of exultation flowing in his heart. He felt that he had flung back in the teeth of the man who had been so gross and so stupid

as to offer him a vile insult through the hands of another, meaner if possible than himself, insult for insult. And yet if the truth be told, angry as he had been at the insult, exasperated as he had felt at the mere idea of such a supposition occurring to the mind of any one with regard to him, there was still deep down in his mind a certain feeling of pleasure at the fact that Lord Sithrington had done this thing. He wanted so much to find in Sithrington a mean man, and a rascally man, that now that he had found all that he wanted, as he believed, he was glad. Now, therefore, he keenly enjoyed the sense of having plainly shown this man what he thought of him, of how little avail were his rank and his exalted position and his innumerable advantages, to shield him from his, Ivor Clay's, honest estimate of his intrinsic worthlessness, no less than the purely meretricious value of any service he could render to his fellows.

In short, Clay's anger, if it was certainly righteous and certainly just, did not nevertheless interfere with the gratification of the purely personal grudge which his heart never ceased to cherish against his father's legitimate son and successor; against the son of the woman who had been given the place that should have been his mother's; against the man who was destined to be Susan Romer's future husband.

It all surged up and tossed and beat against the barriers of thought and consciousness in waves of mingled exultation and burning rage as he walked from the Council Hall to the club, where, as it often happened, he met Teddy Lexham, who, as it often happened also, drove Ivor Clay home—for the two men lived together in Clay's house.

At the club as usual Teddy was found, and his surprise at seeing Ivor Clay so much earlier than usual was not reciprocated by any surprise on Clay's part at seeing him. For Clay well knew that Teddy Lexham's capacity for lounging through life in the most gentlemanly manner possible was

scarcely to be over-rated. But he knew quite as well other capacities of Lexham's, capacities which made him the most valuable of friends in even greater measure than they made him the pleasantest of companions.

The precise position which Teddy Lexham filled on Ivor Clay's working staff it would be difficult to define. Teddy himself declared that he was Ivor Clay's handy man, bottle-washer, general errand boy, and particular crony. He did indeed some secretarial work from time to time, but as a matter of fact secretarial work was not his strong point. What was his strong point was his absolute trustworthiness in Clay's interest, his extraordinary capacities for hearing and seeing everything, and *saying* nothing so far as his chief was concerned, and his passionate loyalty to his chief personally. Perhaps Ivor Clay knew pretty well that the interests of New Britain were very small indeed in Teddy Lexham's eyes compared with the interests of one man in New Britain. Possibly Ivor Clay loved him none the less on that account, for none could have lived the life that he had lived and done the work that had fallen to his lot, without very soon coming to value a friend whose friendship rested wholly and solely upon a personal regard quite apart from, and totally independent of, his public work.

The club was very empty and Teddy very serene. Ivor Clay knew that as yet no hint had had time to reach it of the recent episode at the council meeting. From Ivor Clay's own face and bearing neither Teddy Lexham nor anybody else would have gathered anything other than usual.

"I have an hour or two to spare," he said imperturbably, to Teddy, "suppose you drive me home and let us have a game of rackets?"

"Done you are," said Teddy, hoisting his long length out of the depths of the easiest chair the coffee-room afforded. "The cart," he added, "is at Wilson's. I'll go and fetch it."

"We'll go together," said Ivor Clay. And they went.

During the drive Clay said very little. Arrived at home, they had some lunch and went to the racket court as quickly as possible. The latter was a very fine private court indeed and had been built at the same time as the house. It communicated with the latter by a covered way, which had been cleverly managed to pass through a shrubbery and so did not spoil the look of the grounds. The courts themselves, although at some distance, were thus comfortably accessible, no matter what the weather might be. From the balcony where Susan Romer had stood so lately she could have seen the roof partially visible through the trees and evergreens that had been allowed to grow up around it. Everything about Ivor Clay's house and home was planned and carried out according to his own special taste. And very good taste it happened to be.

As racket players Clay and Teddy Lexham were very fairly matched. But Ivor's superior strength gave him an undoubted advantage, although Lexham was slightly the taller and looked even more so than he actually was, for Clay was broadly built, while Teddy was like a superior umbrella very tightly rolled by a practised hand. The younger man, for all his slightness, had some very pretty strokes, the more effective for their quiet dexterity. His staying power, however, was seldom equal to that of his opponent.

They had played one game, which had fallen to Teddy, and were hard at the second, when footsteps were heard coming—or might have been heard but that the players were making too much noise themselves to hear anything else—along the covered way. A minute or two later Ivor's butler ushered in Arkwright, who made a somewhat sheepish entry, owing to the fact of the butler's presence.

Arkwright was not regarded with special favour

by the functionary in question—a fact of which Arkwright was only partially aware, though he was entirely aware of his own rooted objection to servants of all kinds, and especially and particularly to men-servants. Arkwright looked upon Ivor Clay's men-servants as a reprehensible weakness on Clay's part, only to be borne with because every man has his weakness and no man is perfect. But he did not bear with them graciously. Arkwright seldom bore with anything graciously.

"Arkwright," Teddy Lexham had once said, "is an excellent person, but on the whole trying. For example, he invariably gives his orders to the footman when the butler is present. You can always see the remembrance of that in the butler's face."

Arkwright waved his hand to Clay, who paused for a second to greet him, nodded curtly enough to Lexham, but took no notice of Ivor's cordial request to run up to the gallery till they had finished the game, and make himself jolly. It was easy to see that Arkwright was in a state of seething excitement. Indeed, anything more interesting than the contrast between the ill-suppressed excitement in Arkwright's face and bearing and the composure and pleasant ease of Ivor Clay would be difficult to find.

Reluctantly compelled in the end to beat a retreat to the gallery, Arkwright stood fidgeting there, while Clay went on with his game, playing finely and vigourously, his whole heart and soul in every stroke and point. After some minutes Arkwright could stand it no longer.

"Look here, Chief," he called out, his excitement giving him temerity, "I—I very particularly want to talk to you."

Ivor Clay nodded up to him good-humouredly, but the strength of his attention did not for one second desert the game.

"Right," he ejaculated, being rather breathless, "sit—down, and make yourself happy, my—dear fellow."

"But," cried Arkwright, "time—time is passing."

"Time enough," returned Clay, coolly. "I can't talk, my dear Arkwright—just at present."

Arkwright looked down at him impatiently. Many a face would have lightened in looking on Ivor Clay at that moment. A finely-made man in the prime of manhood seldom shows to greater advantage than in athletic exercise; and Clay was no exception to the rule. The flush that strong exertion had brought to his face, the brilliance of emulation that kindled in his bright blue eyes, the rapidity and agility of his movements, all enhanced and displayed the man's bodily gifts.

But Arkwright had no eye for any such attributes or graces. He sat down now as Ivor Clay had invited him to do, but protest was writ large upon him from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot.

Nor did he pay the smallest attention to the game. The contest going on before his eyes appealed to him not at all. So little in fact that once again during a pause he actually called out to Ivor Clay impatiently. But the latter faced him with a smile indeed, but with a look there was no gainsaying, and a tone in his voice unmistakable as he replied:

"No, no, Arkwright, I'll play the game out."

Arkwright drew back his head with a despairing gesture. The Englishman's devotion and intense gravity over a game was inexplicable to him; nay, it was despicable. Yet he was not as clear-sighted as he supposed himself to be, for he failed to see the full significance of a national type of character which he could not understand.

Curbing his impatience as best he could, his dark, saturnine face indicated his absorption in a train of thought possibly far enough removed from the present scene.

But Ivor Clay had mercy on him, and at the conclusion of the second game, which went to

Clay's splendid play, but not until Teddy had shown very good fight, he approached Arkwright.

"Now, my dear Arkwright," he said good-temperedly, with the little glow of natural elation at winning his game so satisfactorily still in his face and manner, "I am your most obedient servant. Teddy, old man," he added, smiling, "I'm afraid our games to-day are at an end. Give you a chance of pulling off best of three to-morrow."

Teddy Lexham whistled softly a bar or two of a popular melody and nodded assentingly between each stave.

"Too bad," he murmured, pleasantly. "Best game we've had for no end of time. Your form is simply ripping to-day, Chief. Always the way. Pure cussedness of things. Directly a fellow begins to enjoy himself he gets pulled up short." He wagged his head. "I'm a broken-hearted man."

"Hullo," said Ivor, as the three men left the racket ground, "then there's another one."

"Oh, I say, never hit a man when he's down. This is the love of my life, the last romance of a trusting heart. How it will all end," he sighed, "heaven knows."

"Matrimony, my dear boy," returned Ivor, and there was a twinkle in his eye that curiously enough met a corresponding twinkle as it glanced at Teddy's eyes. Both men could feel Arkwright fuming in secret as he walked on up the passage beside them. Lexham closed his eyes with an expression of plaintively exaggerated horror.

"Oh no," he drawled, languidly. "I cannot marry. My love is too passionate for marriage, too romantic, too ethereal. Marriage is the quintessence of the commonplace. Think of it. Kids, you know, mutton broth and rice pudding. That's what it always comes to. Good heavens, imagine romance under the same roof with kids, mutton broth and rice pudding! To love, the object of one's love should be unattainable. Woman should ever remain a mystery, a soft intangibility."

"Take care, old boy, you'll hurt yourself," interposed Clay; "that's a very big word for a small boy." He laid his hand affectionately on Teddy's shoulder and laughed.

Arkwright moved his shoulders under his coat impatiently.

"Chief," he exclaimed, harshly, "I should like to speak with you *alone*, if you please."

The rudeness of the speech caused Ivor Clay's hand to rest a little more lovingly on the younger man's shoulder.

"Certainly," he returned quietly, and the slight chilliness of his tone was the only sign he gave that the rudeness was apparent to him. Teddy Lexham gave no sign whatever. Only when they reached the door leading into the house, he held it open for Arkwright to pass through with a grave formality that he would not have employed with any one else.

Awkwardly enough Arkwright shuffled through. Nevertheless, there was no compunction in his mien for the breach of common courtesy of which he had been guilty. On the contrary, he felt proud and pleased with himself for having shown "the fellow" that he, Arkwright, had come there to hold special intercourse with Clay and meant to enforce his rights; that he, Arkwright, didn't care the snap of your finger for swells from England, let them be ever so much the devil of fine fellows they thought themselves. "Damn their airs and graces, William Arkwright did not care a hang for their cursed 'side'!"

Arkwright could not or would not see that what he chose to stigmatise thus was in truth nothing in the world but Lexham's natural manner; that Teddy could no more put off that manner than he could have put off his skin. What he could see, however, was that Teddy was a companion to Ivor Clay that he, Arkwright, let his services to the latter in public life be ever so inestimable—and Arkwright had a very large estimate of those services

in his own mind—could never be. He was able to see that between Lexham and Clay there was a bond of comradeship that he could never hope to share; the bond of nationality, of class, of similarity in education and ideas, the thousand and one sympathies common to a mode of life and a way of looking at the things of life, which were as a sealed book to him.

The very fact that Teddy Lexham lived with Ivor Clay aroused a sting of jealousy within him, even though he, Arkwright, would not on any account have lived with Ivor Clay himself. He had sense enough to know that in such a household he would be entirely out of place, although Clay, pitying his curious solitariness of disposition and habit, had often pressed him to share a joint home with himself and Teddy.

Possibly there was a tinge of jealousy in the secret feelings of both men that coloured their intercourse with each other. Certainly Lexham on his side felt a little sore now and then when the contrast between his own incapacity for great work or intricate business showed sharply against Arkwright's marvellous industry and patience, and hard, clever capabilities.

But Lexham had what Arkwright had not: the power to control himself. Arkwright had never enjoyed the inestimable benefit of a training and upbringing the keystone of which is rigid abstinence from display of feeling or emotion. Arkwright no more thought of controlling every passing phase of feeling that might seize him than a child. Neither by education nor inheritance had any such idea ever been presented to him. Ivor Clay understood this, and understanding, forgave. But Ivor Clay was not as Lexham was, purely Anglo-Saxon. The Gallic strain in him enabled him to understand Arkwright as it enabled him to understand and sympathise with nationalities other than his own.

Ivor Clay understood Arkwright better by far

than the latter even supposed, and long before the interview which Arkwright had sought with his chief with such impatient arrogance had come to an end, his chief had come to two definite conclusions about him: first, that he and his faction were dangerous allies; and secondly, that if his own conduct of the country's affairs was to be hampered or discredited by them, as this interview showed him to be more than likley, then Arkwright and his faction must go.

CHAPTER XXII.

NOR was Ivor Clay mistaken in those two conclusions. Three days later the country was in a blaze. The episode in the Council Hall had been but the spark needed to fire a train that for some time past had been laid in readiness. Clay had not resigned his seat in the Council, but he had not attended any meeting since that eventful one wherein for the first time in the history of New Britain a member of the Council of the country had openly insulted the President of it.

So far, strangely enough as it might seem, the Queen's Government had taken no overt notice of Clay's act. As a matter of fact, the Government were completely at a loss as to how to act. They had been completely taken by surprise. In New Britain the Government was perpetually being taken by surprise: though one might have thought that in the light of past history they would have found some illumination for present emergencies. That they did not, however, was one at least of the many peculiarities of New British affairs.

There were other peculiarities also. One, in the present instance, was the attitude of the Governor himself. Once more Lord Sithrington was angering his friends and causing his foes to laugh at him, for nothing that his councillors could say would persuade him to exercise his prerogative with regard to Ivor Clay. It was represented to him by officials of legal eminence that he could call upon Clay either to withdraw his insinuations against his Excellency, or by a special power in the Governor's hands, deprive him summarily of

his seat in the Council. But Sithrington would do neither the one nor the other.

In despair the heads of different departments wasted several days trying to persuade him, only to be met with the most inflexible obstinacy conceivable, the obstinacy of a weak man forced into a position entirely repugnant to him.

The Governor would do nothing, and the Arkwright faction stumped the country, raising up forgotten enmities and awakening sleeping dogs to the best of their ability and the utmost satisfaction of themselves and their friends.

Before the end of the week there were riots at Drumballa. The offices of the local Government officials were wrecked, the officials themselves threatened in every conceivable flight of fancy that popular speakers chose to employ, and it was clear that the reign of Anarchy was about once more to inaugurate its alluring course in New Britain.

Arkwright was at Drumballa, ostensibly as superintendent of the mines, although his duties in that respect had sadly fallen into abeyance, since no one would do any work during those weeks, it being pleasanter and freer to spend the time in a change of occupation, never displeasing to certain parties; namely, in uttering threats, and committing outrages against any and every restraint of Government in the land.

At the end of the week a mass-meeting was announced. Under a flimsy veil of legitimate discussion as to the procedure of the English Government regarding the new extension of mining operations at Drumballa, and, of course, the never-failing call for modification or abolition of the veto, the meeting was nothing on earth but a stirring up of strife. It was entirely under the patronage of the Arkwright faction, with Arkwright at their head.

When the placards announcing the meeting were adorning every hoarding and public space in Mapletown, Ivor Clay went out to Drumballa.

He had an interview with Arkwright that was the beginning of the end, because it confirmed certain suspicions of his that for some time past he had entertained. He told Arkwright that he would speak at the meeting, but only on one condition; namely, that in deference to his wishes, certain persons notoriously associated with the worst classes in political life in the country, were not permitted to take any part in it.

Arkwright looked at Ivor Clay with an ugly smile. The two men were in the latter's room in the New British Gold Company's offices at Drumballa.

"They're promised," he said sulkily, alluding to the speakers whom Ivor Clay had denounced; "to go back on 'em now would be impossible."

Ivor Clay folded his arms on the desk in front of him.

"Then the meeting will do without *me*," he said, quietly, "and I shall take care to let the country know my opinion of certain—factionists"—he paused, and uttered the last word deliberately.

Arkwright made a step forward.

"Look here," he said, with one of the most violent of his accustomed oaths, "don't rouse me!"

Clay smiled.

"My dear Arkwright," he said, pleasantly, "it would be the easiest thing in the world for me to wash my hands of the whole business."

The other flinched for a second as he met Ivor Clay's cool glance. Then he burst out again into a torrent of oaths and remonstrances.

"Wait," he said at length, with a certain cunning; "suppose you put in an appearance and speak first, then get away before the others, who's to accuse you then of knowing their intention to speak? I haven't advertised them."

Ivor Clay brought his hand down on the desk heavily.

"Once for all," he said, "I'll have no tampering in that direction."

The other laughed scornfully.

"Blast you!" he cried, furiously; "I believe you're an Englishman after all."

Ivor Clay bore the imprecation and the imputation with entire composure.

"Hold that meeting," he said, "without me? Very well; you know me, you know what to expect——Ah!"

The ejaculation was forced from his lips as the other quite suddenly rushed at him. Fortunately for Clay the mad fury of Arkwright's passion confused and blinded him to some extent, or Ivor would have been a dead man. Fortunately, too, the physical training which Clay's public school and university life had given him stood him in good stead.

Two minutes of a hand-to-hand struggle and the Colt's revolver in Arkwright's possession had changed ownership. Half a minute later Ivor Clay had got Arkwright on the floor and his own right knee rested convincingly on Arkwright's narrow chest.

Holding him with one hand Clay resolutely and without the smallest compunction searched him with the other. He found no more specimens of firearms in his pockets, but he found a pocketbook and a few sheets of paper closely covered with Arkwright's handwriting. The fury of the latter, as his captor quietly drew forth these, knew no bounds. He struggled, rolled, and bit Clay's hand. Three times he dug his teeth into Ivor's hand to force him to relinquish his hold. He might as well have dug his teeth into one of the iron safes in the wall of the room in the expectation of making it open its doors for him.

At length Clay's search was completed; but not before the pain in his lacerated hand was sending the blood out of his face and lips. Arkwright had bitten it to the bone. Before long, horrible shoots of pain like the run of a red-hot iron over his flesh were darting up his hand and arm nearly to the

shoulder. By a supreme effort he dragged Arkwright across the floor of the room till he reached the bell. As the full peal of it sounded through the building Ivor Clay set his teeth. Unless some of them came to him in the course of another three minutes he knew he should have to relinquish his hold. A horror of faintness overtook him. Was he relaxing his grasp? Wait, wait one second longer, for God's sake! He counted bravely, one—two—the red-hot shoots of pain seemed to be darting up his neck to his head; one—two—he began again. Arkwright was moving, he saw his eyes glaring at him, and further at the revolver that Clay had wrenched from him and flung far away on the floor. How long they were!—but he would begin again; one—two—the door opened and two of Ivor's clerks appeared.

Clay held up his hand.

"Come here," he said, but his own voice sounded strangely in his ears. "Mr. Arkwright is not very well. Put him in that chair and *hold* him till I come back. Yes, that will do. Is Mr. Lexham here? Yes? I will go to him. Hold him!"

How he found Teddy he never afterwards was quite clear.

But that Teddy found him there was no doubt, for he discovered him presently huddled up against the wall of the passage outside his own office door, looking more dead than alive, but with the pocketbook and the sheets of closely-written paper tightly clenched in his unhurt hand.

Within, Arkwright could be heard, enlivening his durance vile by the utterance of a series of expletives so elaborately horrible that even the two young men who held him firmly, felt the flesh on their bones creep slowly, and the hair on their heads stir twitteringly as they listened.

Five hours later Ivor Clay, his hand bandaged and his arm in a sling, drove up to Government House. During the past few days the ordinary

escort always on duty there had been doubled, and the cavalry escort rode with carbines.

Ivor Clay found some small difficulty in gaining admittance. His appearance was two well known and his reputation too decided to make entrance just then easy to him. Once admitted he saw the Governor's private secretary first. The latter took the precaution of receiving Clay with a third gentleman in the room—a gentleman who wore the garb of good society and tried to look as if he were accustomed to it. Ivor Clay smiled when he saw him, but he contented himself with requesting the favour of an immediate interview with his Excellency.

The Governor's private secretary tried a refusal; but the attempt was a failure, foredoomed from the moment of its utterance.

The Governor of New Britain Ivor Clay was determined to see, before he, Clay, left Government House that night.

Wynyard left the room.

Ivor Clay and the gentleman who was trying so hard to look as if he were accustomed to being a gentleman, exchanged a look. Then a few words. Then a few more words.

The gentleman grew every moment less gentlemanly and more at his ease.

"Always knew he was a crack-brained party," remarked the gentleman, easily, "always knew it, sir. Now you have him, sir, hold him tight, say I."

Ivor Clay smiled.

"I'll only draw his teeth," he said, quietly.

The gentlemanly man shook his head.

"Hold him," he said, again. "I'll tell you what, sir"—and he grinned, for the gentlemanly man had a great belief in Ivor Clay ever since he himself had made a cool three thousand out of the Drumballa mines—"this country's a crack-brained lot, mind I tell you. Beneath your notice, sir. You give it the go-by, sir."

"No, no," said Ivor Clay, taking no offence where none was meant, "but I will save the country from itself and"—he hesitated—"Arkwright, if possible, from *himself*."

The gentlemanly man smiled again. But steps were heard approaching: his lips had only time to form the words "Hold him" before the Governor's private secretary entered the room with the announcement that his Excellency would see Mr. Clay now—and alone.

"His Ex," said the gentlemanly man to himself, "is a plucky one, but *that* little bag-o'-bones! Lord bless us, it's a great thing to be born in the high flights o' society, otherwise he ain't fit to comb a babby's hair, much less be put to do man's work. He'd be frightened of a babby. So he would."

Mrs. Algernon Wynyard would no doubt have been eminently gratified could she have heard her husband denominated, "a little bag-o'-bones, not fit to comb a babby's hair." But on the whole it was a pity that the great gulf of social demarcation prevented Lady Honoria from forming an intimacy with the holder of such opinions.

His Excellency's groom of the chambers ushered Ivor Clay into the presence of the Governor of New Britain. For the moment that followed Ivor's entry and the closing of the door behind the august functionary who had preceded him, there was silence. Of the two men, for the first time in their lives alone together, it would be difficult to say which was the paler.

Ivor Clay was at all events the more tranquil and composed in bearing. He, of course, was standing, which put him at an advantage, and he remained standing throughout. Apparently the Governor was unwilling to pay him the courtesy of asking him to be seated. He did not even meet his eyes when he said:

"You have asked to see me. Be good enough to state your business with me."

Ivor Clay's eyes were steadier and clearer than the other man's as he involuntarily advanced a step.

"I have asked for the favour of a personal interview with your Excellency, in order to set certain facts which have come to my knowledge before her Majesty's Government, and to make a request of the latter."

Sithrington looked up. A cold smile with a sneer in it touched his lips. He just glanced as he spoke at Ivor Clay's bandaged hand as it rested in the sling.

"Ah," he said, "possibly you find the need of invoking the protection of the Queen's Government."

Ivor Clay's eyes flashed. To the end of time each of those men would rouse the antipathy and antagonism of the other. With a strong effort Clay curbed his inclination to let the small sneering speaker seated at ease in his study chair know what he thought of him.

"Your Excellency," he replied, "will permit me to say that you are mistaken. I have not come here this evening on account of my own safety, but with a view to—your Excellency's."

He paused. He did not and never would like this man who was so close to him in ties of blood, nevertheless he admired the immovable composure with which Sithrington received his words.

The latter did not move in the very least in his attitude of careless ease. He merely inclined his head toward his visitor with a slightly ironical indication in the gesture.

"As I am not in possession of any facts which lead me to suppose that I am in any special danger, I fear I do not quite see how far I am indebted to you, sir."

He spoke rather languidly, and, because anything of formal converse was always more or less difficult to him, in a rather stilted and overweighted turn of phrase; but the faint irony was clearly per-

ceptible in voice and speech as well as it had been in gesture.

Again Ivor Clay's eyes flashed, and again he controlled himself.

"I have not come here," he returned, coldly, "without ample evidence with which to prove to your Excellency that the assertion I have just made is correct."

He paused, and with some awkwardness, owing to the absolute uselessness of his left hand, he drew from the inner breast pocket of his coat the pocketbook and written sheets of paper that he had taken from Arkwright, and held them out to the Governor.

"If your Excellency will be so good as to examine these, further explanation will be unnecessary. They speak for themselves," he added curtly, as Sithrington accepted them without further parley.

An interval of intense silence and stillness followed, broken only by the rustling now and then of the papers in Sithrington's hands. At length the latter raised his eyes from their perusal to the face of his visitor. In his pre-occupation Sithrington failed to notice how drawn and grey that face was. He only noticed the brilliancy of the eyes that met his, a brilliancy induced in great measure by the slight fever that the pain in his hand and the strain of the past hours had provoked.

The Governor of New Britain tapped the loose papers held together in one hand with the forefinger of the other.

"You know, of course, the contents of these?"

Ivor Clay bent his head.

The other looked at him again as if he were trying to apply some test in the hidden depths of his mind to this man before him.

"You wish me to act upon those contents?" he asked, after the slight, barely perceptible pause.

"Yes," said Ivor Clay.

Again Sithrington scrutinised him. He laughed, a curious cold laugh.

"May I ask," he said, "if your object in coming here has been solely your fear for my safety?"—and the question showed more acumen than most people would have credited Lord Sithrington with possessing.

Ivor Clay returned his Excellency's laugh with a smile of comprehension.

"Your Excellency," he said, boldly, "I wish to save this country from its worst enemy!"

Sithrington glanced at him quickly.

"From itself," finished Ivor Clay, firmly.

"You are candid, at all events," said the Governor of New Britain, and the two men had never come so near liking one another as at that moment.

Ivor Clay bowed.

"Perhaps your Excellency will allow me to make one suggestion? Do not proceed against Arkwright."

Lord Sithrington looked up.

"Why?" he exclaimed, sharply.

"Because you will make him the most popular hero in the length and breadth of New Britain if you do."

Lord Sithrington eyed Ivor Clay curiously.

"Ha!" he said, with the same curious cold laugh. "That is a distinction you reserve for yourself, Mr. Clay."

Clay's face flushed darkly. This man tried his temper in a way that few he had ever met managed to do. With admirable control he merely replied:

"Your Excellency holds in your hand William Arkwright's idea of popular political methods. Your Excellency can judge between those methods and—mine."

Sithrington glanced down at the papers.

"Yes," he observed, musingly, "and the prolongation of disturbances like the present would in-

terfere very materially with the country's chief source of wealth."

"It would," said Ivor Clay, and only the knowledge of all that was at stake kept him from taking notice of the oblique imputation as to the purity of his own motives which the Governor's words implied.

It was in moments such as these that Ivor Clay beat men like Arkwright all along the line.

Lord Sithrington raised his eyes from the contemplation of the papers in his hand.

"Your advice in this matter," he said, looking at Clay, "is to take no notice of Arkwright at present?"

"Watch him," said Ivor Clay, "and proclaim the meeting at Drumballa. They will hold the meeting in spite of your Excellency's proclamation, as a bit of bravado. You will then be able to seize the persons mentioned in those memoranda with ostensible reason, for disobedience to the Crown's commands."

The Governor looked distressed.

"I dislike excessively," he said, "having recourse to a law in this country which I would rather see a dead letter. Let them talk freely."

"Not in New Britain, during the present state of things," interposed the other, quickly. "Besides, delay"—he pointed significantly to the papers—"will be exceedingly perilous to your Excellency. I can do no more than advise."

Sithrington appeared lost in thought. Presently he spoke again.

"Do you know," he said, "that your action in this matter places you yourself in a very dangerous position? Especially if I leave this man Arkwright free."

Ivor Clay smiled.

"I must risk that," he said, tranquilly. "I can't let the work of a lifetime be spoilt by madmen," he continued, earnestly. "But, your Excellency, I know William Arkwright. I think I may be satis-

fied that he would not harm me. That is why I do not wish to harm him. I want to keep him from harming himself."

"Humph!" said Sithrington; "that is seldom a successful attempt."

Ivor Clay smiled again.

"Success," he said, quietly, "is generally difficult, your Excellency."

"Upon my honour it is," said the Governor of New Britain, and he said it from the bottom of his heart. "Mr. Clay," he added, "this matter shall be looked into. I have to thank you"—he said it stiffly—"for the debt which the Queen's Government in this country unquestionably owes you."

"Your Excellency," returned Ivor Clay, and his tones were every whit as cold as the Governor's, "I have done what I believed to be my duty to the country. The doing of it has not been a pleasure." He bowed. "I have the honour to wish your Excellency good-evening."

Lord Sithrington bowed slightly in return. When Ivor Clay had left him he sent for his private secretary.

"Lal," he said, at the end of the long interview that ensued, "he has beaten us—fairly."

"He's the devil of a cunning card," said Lal Wynyard, showing his pointed teeth. "I wonder what the dickens he's driving at"—but his face looked white, and he suddenly realised how glad he was that the gentlemanly man whom he had left in the next room was still there. "I'd give something to be quite clear as to his little game."

Lord Sithrington looked at his cousin.

"He's the deuce of a clever fellow," he replied, quietly, "so clever that he has played an infernally bold game. By this stroke he clears himself of the Arkwright gang—who, I have no doubt whatever, have been a considerable thorn in his side for a good while—and at the same time places us under an enormous obligation to him." The Governor flung out his hands with an emphasis

unusual to him. "He is master of the situation," he said, conclusively; "and what is more, I believe he is sincere."

"How the devil are we to know how long he has been in possession of the facts which he now chooses to make us acquainted with?" said Wynyard.

Lord Sithrington smiled.

"My dear Lal," he said, quietly, "that is a question which no one but himself could answer. But I think it is pretty clear that if he had not chosen to present us with the facts, they would have presented themselves very soon in a manner possibly even less agreeable to us than his."

Wynyard's eyes travelled to the pocketbook and papers, and a certain tremor which he could not quite repress stirred his frame.

"Scoundrelly hole this country is!" he snarled, angrily; "hang me, why can't they fight fair? I'd fight any fellow openly——"

"Would you?" said his cousin, drily. "It strikes me you and I didn't fight quite fair with Clay not so long ago."

Wynyard's face reddened.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I failed to pull it off. Of course I'm quite willing to give my appointment to a better man. I'll go at once if you like."

Sithrington laid his hand on Lal Wynyard's shoulder.

"No," he said, quietly, "I was in it too. If we go, Lal, we'll go together."

And just as Sithrington was uttering the words Ivor Clay was saying to Teddy Lexham:

"If I am forced to it I will give Arkwright up to them. But"—he smiled faintly—"it goes hard with me, Teddy, old man, it goes hard with me to do it, for"—his voice sank a little—"I—I should have pulled him up long ago."

The other stared at him. He looked very pale and deadly tired; Lexham thought the whole thing had been too much for him, that he was

scarcely conscious of what he was saying. Teddy Lexham shook his head.

"I don't quite understand," he murmured.

Ivor Clay laid his head back against the chair in which he was seated. His eyes were closed, his hand was giving him a good deal of pain.

"There is so much," he said slowly, without unclosing his eyes, "that none of us quite understand—ourselves, for instance."

Teddy Lexham, to whom the drift of the words was not clear, shook his head vehemently.

"Upon my soul, you needn't have any compunction," he said, warmly; "think of what those infernal dyna——"

Ivor Clay sat up.

"Hush," he said, quickly, "the very walls have ears just now."

Lexham tried a cough and a fresh turn of his sentence. Neither the one nor the other were strikingly successful.

"The country," said Teddy Lexham, "just wants to be pulled together, and you're the man to do it."

Ivor Clay raised himself still further in his chair.

"Yes," he said, "I know what this country wants, and I know what I want for it, and I mean to get both—" He paused, and the hardness that even in youth had been noticeable beneath all the kindliness of his face, had never been more remarkable than at this moment. "Ay, if I have to hang every man of them," he concluded, ruthlessly. But the man who does not know how and when to be ruthless, does not know how to lead other men.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEFORE the sun set the following day the blue and red placards that announced to all Mapletown the "Monster Meeting at Drumballa," were counterfoiled by some plain white placards headed SITHRINGTON, and beginning "*Whereas*," in which was set forth the pronouncement of "WE, George Marmaduke Frederick, Earl of Sithrington, her Majesty's Governor-General of New Britain" to the effect that any person or persons assembling at Drumballa on such and such a date would truly do so contrary to the express prohibition of her Majesty's Government in New Britain, and such person or persons would render themselves amenable to the law, according to the Act—Victoria"—and so forth. "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN."

As Ivor Clay had predicted, the meeting, in spite of the proclamation, was held. But Arkwright was not there—a significant absentee. As Ivor Clay had likewise predicted, a goodly crop of arrests followed the Drumballa meeting, Arkwright not being there, was not arrested. Nevertheless, Arkwright was beginning to have a suspicion that his movements were affording a certain amount of interest to persons whose attention he was not quite desirous of attracting. Meantime, Ivor Clay had succeeded in getting the work at the mines set going again. Teddy Lexham was down there and sent daily reports to Ivor, who remained in Mapletown. Arkwright was still ostensibly editing the *New British Nation*, an occupation which kept him under Clay's eye to a certain extent. But the gentlemanly person whom Ivor had left trying to

sit at his ease in the private secretary's room at Government House, was keeping Arkwright under *his* eye also—a task which occupied him for the better part of one week.

It was not a week from the date of the Drumballa meeting that Susan Romer and the Governor were one afternoon in the palm-house together, as they had been a few weeks before. Susan was rather enjoying herself. To her the disturbances which had occurred were not revealed in their full significance. The piquancy of the situation was its charm in her eyes. She did not know *then* of how very close a horrible danger had come to her. Lady Honoria had a faint inkling of it. But even Lady Honoria was not fully enlightened. Whatever else Sithrington might be, he had a good deal of personal courage, and so no one would have guessed from him of the peril in which he had stood and probably was still standing. But on this occasion he was telling Susan that she would be better in England. Susan, however, by no means wanted to be in England, and she told Sithrington so with an emphasis that under the circumstances he could scarcely fail to find flattering to himself. Nevertheless, he was beginning his arguments all over again, after a fashion of his, when a sudden summons was brought to him.

"Stay here till I come back," he said to Susan, who, nothing loth, signified her assent.

She had a book and made herself comfortable. It seemed to her that she had sat there scarcely ten minutes, when she heard voices speaking. The sound came through the door leading to the house, which Susan could only conclude Sithrington had not closed altogether behind him.

"Knew he was up to larks," said a voice Susan did not recognise. "Very generous of Clay"—at that name Susan involuntarily raised her head—"Ivor Clay is a damned generous chap in some ways. Too good for a dirty lot like *that*. I said —hold him. By G—, I wonder they didn't get

him last night. Unless we're in time he'll be a—" The voice died away.

Susan Romer sat up rigidly. What did it all mean? Her face was pale, her eyes dilated. For the first time the full significance of George's hints came to her, and a horrible sense of dim, unseen, but awfully close peril suddenly seized her. There is no more sickening, maddening sense; nothing that chills the heart, and paralyses the faculties more overpoweringly. If you have ever lived through a reign of terror you will know that; if you haven't, pray to God you never may. Susan Romer drew in her breath quickly. Seated there in the warm scented winter garden she shuddered, as if some dread evil was close beside her. A stir made her start violently. The relief of seeing Lord Sithrington coming towards her was so great that a spasm in her throat choked her utterance for a minute, and she felt hot tears burn under her eyelids.

"George"—she sprang up and clasped his arm—"I have been so frightened."

He started and put his arm round her.

"Sit down," he said, gently, "and tell me all about it."

"George," she said breathlessly, when she had told him, "who did they mean? George, tell me—you must, you must!"

He looked at her and misunderstood the pallour of her face and the terror that was dilating her eyes.

"Susan," he said, taking her hands, and his voice sank to a whisper, "you mustn't breathe a word of this to a living soul, but to relieve your mind I will tell you that they meant Clay, Ivor Clay."

There was an instant's deathlike pause, and then without a word or look Susan Romer burst into a shrill peal of laughter. For a second Sithrington gazed at her in blank bewilderment, then he drew her closer to him and stretched his arm round her again.

"My darling," he said, looking at her with some apprehension and distress, "this is all too much for you, you are quite unstrung."

She thrust him away from her with a curious gesture.

"No, no, no," she stammered, almost incoherently, "only"—she gasped—"oh, it was so funny, so funny, the way you said it."

"Said what?" asked Sithrington, in blank dismay.

"'To relieve my mind,'" replied Susan, gaspingly. "No, George, don't touch me, please, please"—she shrank from his outstretched arms—"don't!"—and as he looked at her face he thought it was quite grey and drawn.

He did not touch her, but he said to himself that he must persuade her to go back to England without delay. He sat very still, however, giving her time to recover herself. In a minute or two he felt her hand upon his arm.

"George," she said again, and her voice thrilled him, "tell me, can't you do something? oh, surely you can do a great deal to—to—stop this terrible—state of things?" The concluding words were almost inaudible.

Lord Sithrington laughed rather harshly.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I suppose I am the protector even of—" He paused. He was going to say of the Queen's enemies, and then he remembered that Ivor Clay had risked his own safety in the Queen's interest. So he did not say it. Sithrington was a truthful man, perhaps he was too truthful for the part he was called upon to play. Anyhow, he did not finish the sentence, and Susan caught it up and finished it in another way for him.

"You are Governor of New Britain," she said, quickly; "you are the Queen's representative; you have full power."

He looked at her with a look that she never forgot.

"I have the shadow, Susan, at all events; of the substance I am not so sure."

She caught his hand.

"Why do they want to—kill—him, George?" she said, almost under her breath.

"Because they are scoundrels," he answered her, gruffly, "and he is not."

She caught her breath with a little sobbing catch that convinced Sithrington that she was "purely hysterical," as he expressed it to himself. "Poor little girl," he added to himself, "how dear of her it is, to feel like this! I should hate a hard woman—ugh!" That he didn't hate Susan, he proceeded to evince forthwith.

"Listen, darling," he began, soothingly, "you come in with me now and have a cup of tea and lie down."

She looked at him as if she did not understand or even hear his words.

"George, what are you going to do?"

"How do you mean, darling?"

"About—about—" She faltered; her tongue refused to pronounce Ivor Clay's name.

"About Clay?" said Sithrington, unwittingly.

"Yes." Her lips formed the word, but the sound of it was scarcely audible.

"'Pon my honour," said Sithrington, still more unwittingly, as he gnawed his highly cultivated moustache in a way that would surely have broken his man's heart could his man have seen him, "it's a bad business, Susan. They as nearly as possible did for Clay last night," (her lips parted but she did not utter a sound; perhaps she could not) "and if he starts for Drumballa to-morrow morning before we have time to warn him, his life won't be worth a minute's purchase. However, we have some hours yet. The worst of it is he flies about the country so perpetually, one never knows exactly where he is. I understand he's in Maple-town to-day, and will sleep at his own house to-night."

"Then you will send, George, to warn him!"

"Oh, of course. I hope to heaven there'll be no hitch, they're such confoundedly—I beg your pardon, darling—such odiously sneaky scoundrels." He paused and touched her cheek lightly with his finger. "Now, you *must* come in," he said, determinedly; "you are so pale, your cheeks are as white as—as paper."

Sithrington's attempt at simile ended prosaically, but at any rate accurately. She looked at him with eyes that were still humid and dilated, and lips that quivered a little. He was very moved as he met her glance, and he had never felt more deeply in love with her.

There was a rare charm in seeing his brisk, masterful Susan, thus reduced to clinging, pathetic womanhood.

"Come, my darling," he said again, entreatingly.

"George"—her lips quivered still—"oh, dear George, you will send in time, you will be *sure* that he is found and warned!"

"My dear darling," protested Sithrington, "of course; the thing is being done this moment. Why, what a dear tender-hearted little girl you are!"

She shivered.

"I, oh no; but it is so awful, so horrible! Oh my God! to think of a man, of any human creature pursued and trapped—and—" Her voice broke.

Sithrington passed his hand through her arm and led her towards the door.

"Never you fear," he said, reassuringly, "it'll be all right."

She looked at him, her face cleared.

"Will it?" she said, speaking more like herself.

"Yes," said Sithrington. He would have said "yes" to anything that Susan wanted at that moment. "Now, dearest"—as they emerged into the corridor—"what will you do?"

She gazed at him and collected her faculties by a supreme effort.

"I will go to my room," she said, rather faintly.

"And lie down," said Sithrington, eagerly. He had a vague idea, derived from recollections of his mother's lifetime, that to lie down afforded a sovereign remedy under every possible circumstance to the feminine mind. He watched her as she went away from him. His somewhat cold, expressionless face softened. He felt a longing to take her in his arms and assure her that he would protect her from every ill, and that his heart would always be her safest resting-place. Quite a rush of eloquent words sprang to his lips for the moment. It struck him that there was something of loneliness expressed in the very lines of her figure as it receded from his gaze. At the bidding of an impulse so unusual he even made a step as if to follow her. But all the same he did not follow her; for, an instant later, all his accustomed reserve and national shrinking from display of feeling had reassumed its sway, and the moment of irresolution passed, taking the impulse of the previous moments with it. At that moment too, Susan disappeared finally from his gaze.

She went to her room, as she had said to Sithrington that she would, but she did not lie down.

Lie down! She could have laughed aloud at the proposal. She did not know how the hours passed or how she spent them other than that the minutes alternated in her mind between a sickening fear of the worst that could happen, and a desperate effort to assure herself that George's assurance was sufficient to relieve her of all such fears. George must know, she protested to herself, George could not be mistaken. The whole machinery of the law was at his disposal, and he was making full use of it to protect Ivor Clay. Then her thoughts would swing back to the opposite extreme. After all, what was the law even at its best? Of how little use it had proved over and over again! How absolutely futile to save a man's life from the malignant fury of men who boasted

that killing is no murder, and who scrupled not at all to murder in the meanest and most treacherous ways! Her imagination painted for her in a thousand forms and a thousand colours, Ivor Clay alone, unsuspecting, defenceless, rushing unwittingly upon the destruction that awaited him, or trapped like some poor, helpless animal in a hideous snare of death.

It was growing dusk already, the February day, which had been dull and lowering from morning, was closing in now to evening even earlier than usual. A fever of agonising surmise seized upon Susan as the afternoon waned and faded.

What if they should not be in time after all to warn Ivor? What if by some mischance they failed to find him? If so, he would start for Drumballa, and then— She shuddered, and the blood rushed back upon her heart so that for the moment she felt actually suffocating. Oh, if she could only know, only be *sure* that they had been in time, that he was safe—safe! All the whole world of happiness and misery lay for her between those two conditions—his safety or his destruction. A sudden passion of dismay and despair came upon her. How terrible it was to be a woman, tied, and restricted, and helpless—helpless. She stamped her foot with rage at the recollection of her own helplessness. He was there so close to her and she could do nothing, not so much as lift a finger in his defence. Even the poorest, the feeblest man of his acquaintance could do more for him than she whose heart was breaking at the mere contemplation of his peril. It was horrible—horrible! There was no worse doom surely for a living creature than to be born a woman!

And then, as the twilight gloomed and deepened about her, and as the very blackness of dread despair encompassed her, a sudden flash of brilliant possibility lightened the darkness within and without. Like the rapid impress of an instantaneous photograph the whole image and picture of this

possibility rose up before her. The very contemplation of it calmed her. In three minutes so extraordinarily had her anguish and her agitation diminished, she was able to think clearly and consecutively, to plan, and to calculate chances and contingencies. She was once more the Susan Romer whom most of her acquaintances knew so well —Susan Romer, brisk, alert, self-seliant, cool.

In a very short time she had arranged her plans and marked out definitely every point in the course before her.

It was characteristic of her that her mind once made up, and her future action once determined upon, she never even paused to ask herself if what she contemplated was either at all necessary, or to calculate the possible effects which it might have for herself personally.

That was not Susan's way.

But with the prospect that lay before her she regained her composure. She was no longer distraught, hysterical, feverish. She even bore the heaviest trial to her patience, the slow passage of the minutes that still lay before her—minutes of inaction—with a fair show of tranquillity. For did not every moment bring the relief of her hideous burden of apprehension and suspense nearer?

When at length her maid appeared to dress her for dinner, she found Susan lying upon the bed in her room to all appearance half asleep.

She raised herself a little as the maid lighted the candles and stirred the fire.

"That will do," she said, addressing the woman, "you need not put out anything for me, for I am not going down to dinner. I have a headache and am not able." Both the headache and the inability were strictly true. "You will take a message please to Lady Honoria Mildmay from me: say to her ladyship that I am very sorry not to be able to come down to dinner and that I hope she will excuse me."

The maid signified her acquiescence respectfully.

"May I fetch you a cup of tea, ma'am?" she added, kindly; "you *do* look pale and suffering-like indeed."

Susan looked at the girl, and for a second a mist of tears darkened her eyes.

"Thank you very much, Carter," she said, in a very low tone, "but I do not care for anything just now. I—I"—she put her hand to her forehead—"I *could* not eat or drink *now*; no, no." She paused, controlled herself, and added quietly: "I know I shall be better by and by. And you need not come back. Perhaps I shall go to bed; at all events I sha'n't want you any more to-night."

"Well, ma'am," said Carter, "if you ring up to 'alf-past ten or so I shall be at 'and."

Then Carter took her departure.

A few minutes later Susan looked at her watch. "Ten to eight," she murmured, "and dinner is at half-past. I dare not stir till they go in to dinner, for fear Lady Honoria should take it into her head to come and look after me—or father, but he is not likely to miss me unless Carter should get hold of him and tell him I am ill. No, I dare not move yet, but I may get out my things."

She got off the bed, making as little noise as possible, and crossing the room she locked the door. This done she opened her wardrobe and took out a skirt of soft Irish frieze with a little coat to match. A boat-shaped felt hat, a pair of thick doeskin gloves, and a warm blouse, she flung on her bed beside the coat and skirt.

When her watch pointed to twenty minutes past eight, she changed her dress to the garments just mentioned, quickly. At half-past eight or a little after she was tidily arrayed in her favourite cycling costume, looking as neat and fresh as if she were just going for a spin in the Park or at a smart club, instead of a sixteen mile ride in the pitch dark to warn a man in danger of his life. Very cautiously she unlocked the door of her room and stepped out

on the landing. So far, so good. But it yet remained to her to get her bicycle and get out of the house without attracting notice. Susan drew a long breath, and the rose pink tinge in her cheeks that had replaced the pallour of the previous hours, deepened into a scarlet flush. Her machine was, she knew, with about a dozen others in a long hall which opened out by a side door upon the courtyard. When they cycled at Government House they usually made use of this door for ingress and egress, as it obviated the difficulty of dragging a bicycle up or down steps. To get to this hall she knew would not be difficult, because one of the innumerable staircases which the house possessed led down to it from the gallery upon which her room opened, and it was most unlikely that she would meet any one thereabouts at that hour. But when the hall was reached and her machine secured the difficulties were only beginning.

However easy, comparatively speaking, it may be for a young lady to steal out of an ordinary house unseen at dead of night, it is absolutely impossible for her to do so if she happens, as Susan Romer happened just then, to be inhabiting a royal palace, or its equivalent.

It was little wonder that, as she crept down the stairs and, reaching the passage safely and secretly, laid her hand on the handle-bar of her own bicycle and drew it out from among the long row ranged along the wall, her heart beat and her temples throbbed agonisingly as she thought of what lay before her, when once she should open the door facing her and step out into the courtyard ; a courtyard guarded by a cavalry escort, and patrolled by sentries, doubled during the past weeks.

In her room, as she had gone over beforehand the pros and cons of everything, she had decided once for all that the only possible plan would be to tell a lie boldly to the soldiers on duty, and say that his Excellency was having a cycling party, of

which she was a member. Fortunately for her, these evening expeditions had taken place several times, the riders starting on a moonlit night after dinner, which was on such occasions earlier than the usual hour, and getting back between eleven and twelve. But of course since the troubles began there had been nothing of the kind. However, Susan felt there was nothing for her but to play her cards boldly, and assume everything coolly.

She rolled the bicycle up to the door, and, laying her hand upon the lock, pulled it back gently. How the noise of it seemed to reverberate through the silence around her! Her hand shook horribly and her knees knocked together, and she set her teeth to prevent them chattering like castanets.

There! The door was open now. What a flood of light seemed to pour down upon the courtyard out of the darkness of the inky sky above! A great flood of white light, for Government House had lately been fitted with electric light, and the old gas-lamps in the courtyard which for so many years had just sufficed to make darkness visible, had given place to great pillars surmounted by brilliant incandescent globes.

In the strong light the grey regimental overcoats of the sentries on duty looked almost white, and the brass buttons on them shone like points of golden fire.

With a heart that was beating treble time and a head held high in the very desperation of extremity, Susan Romer pushed her bicycle through the door into the courtyard and stepped out beside it boldly.

The sentry pacing to and fro was, she saw, coming towards her. On he came, a short, grey figure. In that moment of agonising suspense she noticed that he had no gloves on, and that the hand supporting the rifle over his shoulder was quite extraordinarily large for the man's size, as well as being very red. She was conscious of a feeling of

wonder at his evidently preferring to go without gloves on such a cold winter's night. But he was coming up to her: step by step, tramp, tramp. On he came, looking full at her. Susan, her hand on the saddle, shook and quivered. On he came, nearer, nearer still. Then—he passed her by.

Fortunately for her it did not enter into the mind of the stolid English lad, recruited from a Midland county, to go for one instant outside his appointed duty. He had been ordered to walk up and down, so many feet, to and fro, on a certain bit of ground, for so many hours: and walk up and down thus he would if the last trump had sounded in his ear. As to the ladies in Government House riding bicycles at nine o'clock at night, or any hour of the day or night, that was no business of his. He had not received any orders on the subject of ladies. He had received certain orders, it is true, respecting people going in, or who might possibly seek to go into Government House, but he had received no orders about people coming out thence. Therefore it was no business of his. He did not conjecture, or surmise, or imagine. He was an Englishman told to do a certain thing and to obey specific orders, and he did so.

Tramp, tramp. Susan Romer, her heart beating in her throat, mounted her bicycle expeditiously and rode out across the wide courtyard. Once past the cavalry at the big gates and she was safe. But here too she reckoned without her host. The smart hussars sitting stiffly on their chestnut troop-horses saw no reason for stopping a lady who had evidently passed the sentries within, and who, for all they knew, might but be the foremost member of a party including the Governor himself; for they too were familiar with the evening cycling parties that had been such a favourite pastime of late with the ladies and gentlemen at Government House.

Had Susan been going in, instead of coming out, then indeed they would certainly have interro-

gated her. Possibly, too, when Susan returned by and by she would find it a matter of greater difficulty to get in again, than she was finding it to get out, but Susan never once thought of that. Indeed the return journey which she would be obliged to make never presented itself to her mind at all.

To reach Ivor in time, as she believed, to warn him, and thereby satisfy herself of his safety, was all that she thought of. Beyond that point her mind had not travelled one inch as yet. Nor if it had would any such consideration have deterred her from the present undertaking. If to do what she was doing was a terrible thing, and she felt that it was, to remain supine and in ignorance of what might be befalling him, was absolutely intolerable.

So long as she could *do* anything Susan Romer was comparatively content. The insupportable horror of inaction is not unbearable only to men.

Well, she was out now in the open street. She drew a long breath and steered her machine deftly round a rather sharp corner. That she was actually outside Government House and swinging along unhindered and unnoticed seemed almost too good to be true. The exhilaration of the evening air, joined to the sense of elation which she experienced, made her feel that good luck was following her, and raised her spirits and steadied her nerve. The riding was easy, too, for at that hour, of course, the traffic was very thin, merely a few straggling vehicles here and there. The night was very dark, but the streets were fairly well lighted, and as yet no thought of personal danger crossed Susan's mind. She sped on, not forcing the pace at all, but going steadily, if anything husbanding herself for the miles which stretched before her. How fortunate it was, she reflected, that their previous cycling expeditions had made the streets and suburbs of Mapletown so familiar to her. She knew now exactly which streets to traverse, even without previously consulting the map.

Government House was situated, so to speak,

on the fringe of Mapletown; but in order to get to Ivor Clay's house, which was quite outside even the suburbs of the city in the opposite direction, it was not necessary to pass through the city. Susan rode down two streets, and turning off to the right crossed a bridge over the river, and soon was speeding away through a growing suburb of small terraces of red brick houses, built for the habitation of those whose incomes never by any chance pass three figures.

Presently, for she was now riding very fast, increasing her pace unconsciously, the terraces began to fade into villas—villas large and villas small, villas pretty and villas ugly. The roads began to grow darker. Erelong Susan found herself between high stone walls, and the road began to grow very dark indeed. Still her spirits and her nerve kept up. She was conscious that she was covering the distance magnificently. Another turn and she was out on a wide highroad, one of the oldest in or near Mapletown, a great coach road before the railways were made; since their inauguration, its true occupation, like Othello's, was gone, but it bade fair to recover some of its former bustle in these days of universal cycling. The long expanse of the Old Town Road, as it was called, stretched before Susan, and the sullen murmur of the sea began to beat in her ears. Halfway down the long expanse the girl's nerve suffered its first subversion. It would be difficult to say why or wherefore; only that a woman's nerve is seldom a trustworthy factor.

Still she did not give way. On, on, on. She was forcing the pace now, and the murmur of the sea no longer beat in her ear; for in truth the beating of her own heart was all the sound she heard just then, and it was a sound that grew so unpleasantly obtrusive, that before very long it nearly deafened her to everything except itself.

How dark it was! And how lonely! She would not have minded the loneliness if only it had

not been dark. But the dark, the dark! How she *hated* darkness! And she is only just halfway! Halfway, and the roads grow lonelier and darker. Stay, here is a feeble gas-lamp in front, trying to make darkness visible. It dazzled Susan's short-sighted eyes, even through the spectacles which she was generally obliged to wear when cycling, at least whenever the light was bad or uncertain. It dazzled her dreadfully, coming as it did full against the rays of her own little lamp. But, dear heaven! what was that dark figure lurking under the shadow of the wall? Skulking horribly and staring at her! The beating of her own heart quite deafened her now. But she called all the powers of her mind and body to her aid and flashed past the lamp-post.

She could have screamed with laughter, the relief which came to her as she did so was so great. Why, the horrible skulking figure was nothing more than the figure of a harmless constable, resting a minute under the wall in his nightly beat! He stared, as well he might, as Susan's 'safety' went past him like a flash, the whirr of the rubber tyres rushing through his ears like the distant passage of a railway train through a long tunnel.

Susan, a quarter of a mile away from him, drew her breath with a sobbing gasp.

She had left the Old Town Road behind by this time. Four miles more and Ivor Clay's house would be in sight. Yes, but what miles! Through what a lonely little streak of country, and so dark! Oh, why was the world ever dark? the world that has women in it! Oh, why had she ever come? why? How mad she had been!

And yet the thought of Ivor never for a second left her mind, and she still pressed on gallantly. She told herself that she could have borne it calmly but for the unusual darkness, and the hills; for the country round Mapletown was hilly and undulating. Three big hills Susan knew she had before her. Three big hills—one up, and two down.

And she dare not risk her machine on these hills. She dare not. Dismount she must. With beating heart and quaking limbs and a brain that seemed on fire, she dismounted at the foot of the first hill, and pushing her machine before her, tramped up it gallantly.

More than once her breath went from her, and her agony of terror became so great that the tears rolled down her cheeks, but she kept on, on—for him, for *him!* There, she had reached the top! She mounted her machine again without so much as waiting to dry her eyes; and indeed the wet tears soon dried of themselves on her hot cheeks. The second hill she actually managed to ride down, for it was not very steep; but the third—impossible!

She remembered even at that moment how she had laughingly protested to Ivor a few weeks before that he ought to have the road there levelled, seeing that it lay outside his garden wall. She remembered calling it the "cyclists' terror." Ah, how little she thought then of the meaning her jest would soon have for her!

Her heart pained her with hot, stinging throbs of terrified nervousness as she got off the bicycle and crept down the big hill under the shadow of Ivor Clay's garden wall, and under the black canopy of darkness which the overhanging branches of the trees—bare of foliage though they were—stretched above her head. Down, down, the bicycle dragging under the trembling grasp of her hand.

God be thanked, here was the gateway at last! She turned her bicycle, and, mounting, rode into Clay's avenue through the gates, which were wide open. In her agitation she forgot to notice that the gates were lying wide open, as if a carriage had just passed through them, or to be surprised. All she was capable of knowing or feeling was that she was there. She rode almost recklessly down the winding gravel path that was sloping enough to

make an ordinary rider wary. But what was it to her after that awful ride? Nothing, nothing! The colour leapt up into her face once more as the light from the windows of the house burst upon her view. Here was the hall door at last. In a second she was off the bicycle and her finger was on the button of the electric bell. Before the ring of it had ceased to vibrate she had remembered to pull off the hideous spectacles which she hated. She put her hands to her hair, too, and tried to straighten it; she buttoned a forgotten button of her glove.

Footsteps within brought scarlet blood to her face. Great heaven! how, after all, could she ever bring herself to ask for Ivor? Alone, at such an hour!—in such a place!

The next instant the door was flung back widely. A flood of warm shaded light poured out upon Susan. In the open doorway she saw Clay's discreet butler standing, behind him the pretty hall with the long billiard-table in the centre of it.

What she said, or how she said it, she never afterwards remembered; but the next moment she realised that she was crossing the hall, preceded by the butler, whose imperturbable gravity and respectful bearing might have led any one to suppose that he was in the habit of ushering young ladies of high social standing, at ten o'clock at night, alone, into his master's drawing-room. In the depths of her confusion Susan knew that the door he opened was that of the drawing-room —the room she had liked least in the house, for it wanted a woman to live in it and put it to rights, she had told herself the first moment she had entered it. The man flung open the door and murmured something—her name of course—to whoever was within. He looked back then to Susan, who had paused in a sudden agony of shame and shyness.

There was another step audible, and then a hand took hers and drawing her into the room, shut the door behind her.

"Ivor"—she spoke quite loudly, though she was unaware of doing so, as well as of her involuntary use of his christian name—"my dear—my dear—are—you—safe? I—I—have—come——there is an awful—— I—rode like mad—all the way, because you——" She stopped short, her face blanched, her eyes dilated, her lips widely parted. She had suddenly become aware that Ivor Clay and herself were not the only occupants of the room.

Standing by the fireplace and confronting Susan with a smile that would have baffled the collective penetration of mankind to determine its meaning, was—Lady Honoria Mildmay.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE eyes of the two women met for a second's space. Then Ivôr Clay, standing between them and with Susan's hand still resting in his, tightened his grasp instinctively. For Susan, with a swirl like nothing in the world so much as that of an expiring peg-top, twisted round twice where she stood, sighed, shivered, and fell up against Lady Honoria in as pretty a faint as ever a young woman had accomplished, even in the days when the art of *swooning* appropriately was considered quite an alluring item in a young lady's polite education.

Nothing could afterwards exceed Susan's rage and contempt for this unique performance of hers. And yet, unless she was prepared to revolutionise the laws of Nature, nothing more natural could have happened; because Nature is not prepared to allow you, if you happen to be a highly strung, highly educated—the terms are synonymous—young woman, to pass through several hours of extreme anguish and anxiety of mind, to ignore and neglect your harmless needful dinner, and take a fifteen or sixteen miles ride on a bicycle at the utmost stretch of your speed, and in the end remain as untouched by the stress and strain, as if you had never undergone anything of the sort. That is not Nature's way: moreover, the destiny that guides the affairs of man and woman, likes to show man and woman—especially woman—how exceedingly easy it is for them, despite all their pride of superior power, to collapse quite ignominiously and unexpectedly at the earliest possible point.

Susan Romer's collapse was, however, distinctly opportune; for it saved herself from explanations which would have been, to say the least, uncomfortable, and it placed Lady Honoria in possession of certain items of information which, all things considered, it was perhaps as well should be in her safe keeping, and which certainly afforded her an amount of entertainment such as she had hardly hoped would come to her again in this life.

When Susan Romer opened her eyes once more, and began to be conscious of the things of this world in their natural order again, the first thing that met her mortal gaze was Lady Honoria's extraordinarily wrinkled countenance, out of which peered two keen blue eyes, in the depths of which such wicked mirth twinkled and sparkled and flashed in Susan's face, that she felt more dazed and silly than ever, and more utterly incapable of conceiving clearly where she was and what she was doing with Lady Honoria, or Lady Honoria with her.

But presently she knew that some hand was supporting her shoulders, and she began to discern a voice in her ear speaking words that even before she was fully conscious of her surroundings or her whereabouts or anything else, sent furious blazing blushes all over her face, till she felt as if the very roots of her hair were being scorched.

Lady Honoria's thin, acrid tones interposed as Lady Honoria's wicked old eyes met Susan's wide open gaze.

"Upon my word," said Lady Honoria, addressing some third person, "you must hold your tongue this instant. Good heavens! the girl will blush herself to death before our eyes. Be quiet!" and Lady Honoria stamped her foot as Lady Honoria well knew how.

Susan made a quick attempt to raise herself. She felt horribly dishevelled; her collar was hanging off and her hair she fancied was wet. Her

hat was lying on the floor, and her gloves had disappeared.

"Lie still," said Lady Honoria, imperiously. But Susan Romer was a young woman accustomed to have her own way—like most young women at present. Quite determinedly she struggled to her feet and stood confronting the two other occupants of the room, both of them now reduced to silence. Susan caught the top of the sofa to steady herself, for she was still feeling weak and shaky to a degree she was not at all accustomed to. But, all the same, she put her disengaged hand up to her roughened damp hair with a little instinctive gesture of apology.

"You must think me crazy," she said, trying to speak in something of her natural tones, "but—I could not bear it! How could I stay there doing nothing when once I knew that perhaps *you*——" Her voice faltered, for her eyes encountered Lady Honoria's small sarcastic face wrinkled into a thousand lines and crosses of quizzical, malicious amusement. She strangled the sob that rose in her throat and met Lady Honoria's Rabelaisian smile with an intrepidity that did her credit. "And after all," she added, her voice sharpened from agitation, and pain, and disappointment, "it would seem that I have not even been the first."

Lady Honoria bowed slightly and her lips wore a mocking smile.

Susan grew paler, and looked dazed.

"How," she faltered, "how could I know?"

"There is a great deal you could not possibly know," returned the latter, sardonically.

"So it would appear," cried the girl, coldly. "Bah!"—she tried to laugh, but the sound was more like a sob—"I—I—have been a fool for my pains." She put her hands to her face in the sudden blinding smart of her mortification. Ivor Clay sprang forward.

"No," he exclaimed, "no, no! it was the no-

blest, bravest, dearest act that ever woman did in this world!"

"Oh, dear me!" interpolated Lady Honoria.

"Susan"—he drew her hands away from her face and gazed into her eyes, and his own were ablaze with triumph—"come what may, I can always remember that you *cared* so much, that——"

She snatched her hand away from his.

"Ah, don't," she said, hoarsely, "you will break my heart."

He drew himself up to his full height and confronted her gallantly.

"Nothing," he said, recklessly, "can break *my* heart after this night. My beloved, I defy man or mortal to rob me of this night's glorious happiness."

"A-hem," interposed Lady Honoria, "it is time I think for *me* to go home. With your permission I will order the carriage." She turned and looked at Susan with a twinkle in her eyes. "May I ask," she said, sarcastically, "which of *his Excellency's* carriages *yon* were good enough to make use of? —*I* have the brougham."

Susan Romer raised her eyes for the first time since she had entered the room. She raised her head too, and the soft curves of her throat, which the hastily opened collar of her dress revealed fully, swelled a little with the gesture.

"I," she said, and she stared full at Lady Honoria with as haughty a stare as even that old lady herself could have accomplished—which is saying a good deal, "I—rode here."

For once in her life Lady Honoria was taken aback.

"You what?" she exclaimed, incredulously.

"Rode," said Susan, firmly; "cycled."

"You rode on a bicycle," said Lady Honoria, "from Government House to this house, alone?"

"Alone," replied Susan, and there was a little ring of pardonable triumph in the words which followed, "to save a man's life."

Lady Honoria looked at Clay. His great square head was thrown back, he looked as a man might look who had been offered a kingdom.

"Ivor," said Lady Honoria, and she had never spoken more distinctly in her life, "upon my honour, she is fit to be the mother of brave sons."

Susan snatched her hat and gloves from an adjacent chair.

"I think, Lady Honoria," she said, hastily, "that if you allow me I will order the carriage for you."

From where Ivor Clay stood he could see nothing but the back of her neck—and even that was scarlet.

Lady Honoria put out her hand and pulled Susan round promptly.

"You're very kind," she said, coolly. "I suppose you intend to ask me to give you a seat; or —perhaps you'd like to ride back as you came?"

"Oh, no," said Susan, "oh no, no!" Her face paled and a quick shudder passed over her frame. "I *couldn't* face that awful darkness again. Oh, it was so dark and so lonely!"

Ivor Clay started forward again, but Lady Honoria stepped between him and Susan, and thrust him back with a gesture of her right hand and arm.

"My carriage," she said, formally, "if you please, sir."

She put Susan into the brougham first, and her last words to Ivor Clay merely referred to an arrangement for sending Susan's bicycle back to Government House on the following day. A moment later the carriage was whirling up the drive and out through the lodge gates.

Lady Honoria was sitting bolt upright, very erect and uncompromising. Susan was lying back shrinkingly in her corner. Lady Honoria looked at the girl and grinned. Susan did not present a heroic figure. It is difficult to look heroic in a tumbled modern cycling costume, and Susan's hat was very crooked, and her hair had gone out of curl.

"You're the most miserable looking object," remarked Lady Honoria, kindly, "I ever saw in my life, with your face as white as a sheet, and your clothes bedraggled. How any man on earth could care to look twice at you is a mystery to me."

Susan laughed weakly. Yet her instinct generally prompted her in dealing with Lady Honoria, and its prompting as a rule was correct.

"Really?" she said, steadying her voice resolutely. "I am—very hungry."

"Where have you dined?" said Lady Honoria, briefly.

"Nowhere," said Susan.

"Precisely where I dined too," said the old lady, with a grin. She looked quite airily indifferent to this lack of sustenance.

"You are wonderfully strong, Lady Honoria," faltered Susan.

"I'm not in love," returned Lady Honoria, drily. "Moreover," added the speaker, maliciously, "I have never been in love with two men—at the same time. That must be very fatiguing indeed."

Susan went red and white in the shadow of her corner.

"Then you didn't go down to dinner?" she said to Lady Honoria, with an attempt to divert the current of conversation.

"I?" said Lady Honoria; "no; nor did you, apparently."

"I—I sent word," said Susan, stammeringly.

"So did I," returned her companion.

"Does George know?" interposed Susan, quickly.

"George," said Lady. Honoria, "thinks I'm in bed with a headache."

"And he thinks *I'm* in bed with a headache too," said Susan, and as she said it the eyes of the two women met in the dim light of the carriage lamps that flashed in oblique rays into the brougham.

"He! he! he!" laughed Lady Honoria; "he! he! he! he!" and her smile was more Rabelaisian than ever.

She looked at Susan and half closed her keen malicious eyes.

"I shouldn't wonder," she said, in her thin metallic voice, "if George refused to marry you, my dear, after this escapade; no, upon my honour"—and she pinched Susan's cheek. "Oh, don't look so scared, my dear, *one* of them is the most that the law will allow you."

Then Lady Honoria began to sing softly. The words of the song were very audible, for Lady Honoria had sung well in her day. "How happy could I be with either," sang Lady Honoria.

CHAPTER XXV.

IVOR CLAY went back to his deserted drawing-room. He did not look just then like a man who had only an hour or two previously been made aware of the fact that his life was at any moment likely to be ended by a violent death. He looked like nothing but a conqueror, a triumphant lover, a sovereign who knows that his kingdom is assured to him. Yet he was neither a conqueror nor a king, and as a lover his position left a good deal to be desired. Nevertheless, he strode through the hall and into the drawing-room with a gallant bearing. Closing the door, he stood in the empty room. As yet it seemed to him that the room was full of Susan, He almost felt the touch of her hand as it had rested in his, the warmth of her breath as it touched his cheek when he supported her, the thrill that stirred his veins as the loose locks of her dark hair lay against his neck. He walked over to the sofa on which she had lain. The cushions were lying tossed and crumpled, thrown aside carelessly. He bent down and touched them. One, a soft Liberty pillow of glorious Japanese silk, in a myriad blending of the colours which none but the Japanese dare combine, bore still the dent and impress in it of where her head had rested. Ivor Clay bent his head lower and lower still till his lips pressed the rounded hollow again and again passionately. He smoothed it then tenderly and put it into its proper place once more, but his eyes were dark with tears as he raised himself up, and he was obliged to pause for a time in order to regain

his composure before transacting certain business that awaited him. Presently he laid his hand upon the bell, and when he gave a message in a few curt words to the servant who appeared, his voice and manner were quite as usual. By the time the drawing-room door was opened again, he had thrust every thought from his mind but the business before him. The door opened to admit the gentlemanly person whom a few nights previously he had found in Wynyard's room at Government House. Ivor Clay looked at him composedly.

"I am sorry," he said, pleasantly, "to have kept you waiting so long, but I had visitors with me whom I could not possibly neglect."

The gentleman smiled.

"Not at all, sir," he responded, amiably; "didn't inconvenience me in the least—only every moment is of consequence."

Ivor Clay came a little nearer to where the man stood.

"Look here," he said with his quiet smile, and the peculiar steady look into the other's eyes characteristic of him, "I want twenty-four hours' start for a friend of mine."

The other gazed at him admiringly.

"Very handsome of you, sir, upon my conscience, but risky. Suppose your friend doubled back on us?"

"He won't," said Ivor Clay, briefly, "take my word for that."

The gentlemanly man coughed deprecatingly, and said:

"Well, sir, you'll remember, that I know nothing, see nothing, understand nothing. We haven't mentioned no names, sir. Always glad to oblige you, sir, but a man like me has to be cautious."

Ivor Clay nodded.

"To-morrow," said the gentlemanly man, "we will have the whole gang safe in her Majesty's keeping, thanks to you, sir. Your friend, sir,

will not, I hope, come in our way—that's all." He coughed again.

"He will not," said Clay.

"What you undertakes, sir, you carries through, if I may make so bold. And I'll say good-night, sir. And if I was you I'd go to Drumballa to-morrow *two* trains earlier than I was expected; that's all, sir."

And according to this peculiar bit of advice Ivor Clay acted on the following morning.

Arrived at Drumballa, he sent for Arkwright. The latter entered Clay's office for the first time since that day more than a week previously when he had done his best to shoot the man who had been his steadfast friend.

Arkwright's face was pale, with a dull grey pallour.

Ivor Clay standing up very straight and squarely, looked at him steadily.

"You—are—early," muttered Arkwright, sullenly.

"Yes," said Clay; "earlier than you, or your friends quite expected."

Arkwright started.

"Trapped, by G—!" he said, with an oath.

Clay lifted his hand as the other made a movement. "No," he said, quietly, "not this time: forewarned is forearmed," and the shining muzzle of a small "British Bulldog" flashed in Arkwright's eyes. Ivor Clay lowered the revolver. "Arkwright," he said, "I had a visitor last night," and he added a name, one man's name, and Arkwright's dark thick hair showed drops of sweat standing under it on the temples. "*He*," said Ivor Clay, significantly, "has given me twenty-four hours' start for a—friend of mine—*on condition*—that my friend never again returns to this country." The face of the other man worked convulsively. Ivor Clay knew well that no punishment to the man could be greater. "My friend," he added, quietly, "must not be found in New Britain after

5 o'clock to-day. It is now"—he looked at his watch—"9.30. Get on board, Arkwright, as early as you can."

Arkwright clenched his hands furiously.

"God," he cried, "what a damnation fool I was! And we'd have had the whole lot of them. Sithrington himself included."

"Yes," said Ivor Clay, "and what good would that have done you? To blow Government House to bits, would that have subverted the Queen's Government?"

"Pshaw!" said Arkwright; "you never were with us."

"No," said Clay, calmly.

Arkwright laughed furiously. He flung up his hands. "We played, and lost. You played, and won, damn your cool temper!"

Ivor Clay smiled, but it was a sad, kindly smile.

"Arkwright," he said, his voice gentler, "if I didn't know your temper I'd have let you go to the gallows. But I don't think you know your own temper."

Arkwright laughed contemptuously. Ivor took his left hand out of the pocket of his coat. Upon it was a grey kid glove from which the tops of the fingers had been cut. Pulling off the glove slowly, and removing a thin linen bandage beneath, Clay held out the back of the hand to Arkwright.

"What are those?" said the latter quickly, and he pointed to three horrible-looking red scars deep in the flesh.

"The marks of your teeth," said Ivor Clay, quietly.

Arkwright recoiled with an expression of horror.

"My teeth?" he exclaimed; "did I do that?"

"Yes," said Clay.

"Before God I didn't know I was doing it!"

"No," said Ivor Clay, "I daresay not. But the mark will be there for many a year." Truly, for Ivor Clay would carry the livid scar of it to the grave.

With a wild inarticulate cry Arkwright threw up his hands and burst into a passion of tears. Ivor laid his hand on the man's bent shoulder.

"Arkwright," he, said, very gently, "twenty-four hours' start is worth something in a man's life. Go, and begin afresh."

The other raised his face. The tears were rolling down his cheeks in the heavy rugged furrows that lined and scarred his skin.

"Lost," he muttered, hoarsely; "lost, lost!" He looked at Clay and something of almost childish wonder passed across his face. "Everything," he added, in a whisper, "everything you want to do, you do. And everything you want to get, you get."

Ivor Clay smiled.

"No," he said, half to himself, half to the other, "not everything."

But Arkwright scarcely heard the low spoken protest. He stared at Ivor for an instant longer, muttered something confusedly, turned on his heel sharply, and was gone.

The Governor of New Britain was standing in his study at Government House thirty-six hours later. Facing him was his aunt, Lady Honoria Mildmay.

"Tilson," said Lady Honoria, "will corroborate every word I said yesterday."

"Tilson!" exclaimed Sithrington; "so Tilson knows——"

Lady Honoria grinned.

"The secrets," she replied, incisively, "that Tilson has locked up in tin boxes, would, if let loose, make the fortunes and leave something to spare, of half the young men and young women who are trying to write novels nowadays. He! he! he!" Lady Honoria laughed thinly, "what a figure most of our friends would cut if Tilson opened his boxes!"

Lord Sithrington looked white and distracted, and he had dark shadows under his eyes, as if he

had not slept well—which he had not—the previous night. He studied his well-kept finger-nails and gnawed his cultivated moustache.

"Aunt Honoria," he said, and his voice was rather thick, "it was a confoundedly plucky thing of her to do. Damn him," he muttered under his breath, "she wouldn't have done it for me."

Lady Honoria folded her hands complacently.

"She is a woman of honour," she said, composedly, "you may marry her and trust her. You are fortunate, George. The breed is not common——"

"Nowadays," concluded her nephew with a flash in his eyes.

"Any days," corrrected his aunt, coolly.

Lord Sithrington stamped his foot, and a word for which he should have apologised, considering the nature of his audience, but for which, all the same, he didn't, escaped his lips.

"Do you think," he said, harshly, "that I am going to owe my wife to *him!*" He laughed, a curiously agitated, excited laugh for him. "I'll go one better than him, after all." He paused. "Perhaps," he added more quietly, "you would kindly find—her—and bring her here."

Lady Honoria's eyes glittered. Her face was a study in demure benevolence as she looked at her nephew.

"My dear George," she murmured, "do nothing rashly."

Sithrington turned on her. His blood was up, and he came of a full-blooded race.

"I'll be even with him," he said, "if—if I pull out every tooth in my head!"

And if Lady Honoria smiled, she knew that to pull out even one tooth involves considerable pain.

When she opened the study door half an hour later and pushed Susan Romer into the room, she murmured to herself as she retreated:

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, but never a word about the virtues of

the mothers. The Jews were glorious pagans, after all; and yet if women did not lead the sharpest of them by the nose, I don't know my Bible, that's all." She sank down on the sofa in her room, for weariness will sometimes catch you up, even if you have outrun it for more than seventy years, and are still indomitably indifferent to its approaches. "Well—well," she said to herself a minute later, "God never gave me a son."

In Sithrington's study a few paces off, dead silence succeeded Susan's entrance. The oppressiveness of it was, after what seemed to the girl as one interminable age of agonising embarrassment, endured helplessly by her, at length broken by the man who advanced to her side.

"Susan"—his voice was heavy and toneless—"is it true what Aunt Honoria has been telling me?—you know what she has been telling me?—about your ride?—about"—he explained desperately as she did not utter a syllable—"your—your feelings of late?" He paused. The girl's head sank a little beneath his words. "Susan"—he drew closer to her—"answer me. Is it true? Do you care for this man?"

A red flood of colour swept over her face and her head sank lower still. She made an effort and raised her eyes to his for one flashing second. But she could not speak. There was no need. That scarlet flame in her face and the one passing glance from her eyes answered him only too clearly.

Sithrington drew back with a sudden wounded gesture. For a moment he did not utter a word, and his lips looked white. Then he forced himself and spoke with cold quietude.

"You know now, of course, who he is," he said deliberately, and the way in which he said it seemed all at once to definitely put an end to the bond between them for ever.

The colour flickered in her face curiously.

"Yes," she barely whispered.

Lord Sithrington smiled—a pale, bitter smile.

Susan Romer stretched out her hands impulsively.

"George," she cried, quickly, "he has been the soul of honour—oh, believe me."

The bitterness of the little smile that still curled round her companion's lips did not lessen.

"I have not accused him in any way that I am aware of," he returned, curtly. But his voice faltered. If he had needed any further demonstration in answer to his doubts, that quick passionate appeal of hers—that was also a passionate defence—had given it to him.

He looked at her once more, and despite the pain and anger at his heart he had never loved her better than at this moment, when out of the abundance of her love her lips spoke bravely for his successful rival.

"Apparently he has a monopoly of all the virtues," he exclaimed harshly, and to save his life he could not have restrained that gibe.

She turned pale. But this time she was able to look at Sithrington without flinching.

"Blame me if you will," she said, drawing herself up, "you have a perfect right to do so, but—none else. At least"—she raised her head another inch higher—"you might show yourself as generous as he has been to you"—and then suddenly she broke down. "George," she said, sobbingly, "forgive me, forgive me, I can never forgive myself."

A curious expression passed over Sithrington's face. He made no response to the cry that all the same went straight to his heart. Apparently his ear had caught some sound from without, for which it had for some minutes been listening. Moving forward a pace or two he placed himself quickly in front of Susan.

At the same instant the door of the room was thrown open and—"Mr. Clay, my lord," was the announcement that instantly followed.

Standing before Susan so that his frame almost

entirely shielded her from the view of the servant, Lord Sithrington awaited Ivor Clay's advance. The latter walked forward slowly. Within a foot or two of Sithrington he paused and bowed very slightly and with the coldest formality.

"Your Excellency," he said, speaking with the coldest formality also, "has been pleased to send for me."

Sithrington, his eyes steadily confronting Clay, moved aside one step, and the latter caught sight of Susan. The blood rushed like a strong tide to Ivor Clay's face. Involuntarily some inarticulate exclamation escaped him. But he stood firmly, and there was neither fear nor shame in his eyes as they met those of his half-brother unflinchingly.

Sithrington turned very white, and a smile that was faintly malicious, but which brought out in his face an odd resemblance to his aunt, Lady Honoria, crossed his lips.

"Mr. Ivor Clay," he said, distinctly, "we are a little more than kin, you and I, although until very lately I had not the good fortune to know it. We are, also, I fear, a little less than kind in our regard for each other. All the same, I have asked you to come here this morning because"—he paused deliberately and the malice of his smile unconsciously deepened—"I wish to ask you to accept a favour at my hands."

Ivor Clay moved a little. His face turned a dull, dark red. His lips trembled. A flash of anger lighted his eyes.

"Your Excellency," he replied, and his voice shook with passion, "I do not accept favours at the hands of any man."

Sithrington stepped forward quietly, a gleam of something closely resembling satisfaction reflected in his eyes. He turned to Susan Romer, who, shaking and silent, had not moved or spoken since Clay entered the room. Taking her hand in his he drew her forward until she stood between himself and Ivor Clay, his elder brother.

"Susan," he said gently, but there was for all its gentleness a ring of coldness in the accents of his voice, "perhaps Mr. Clay will accept at your hands what he so scornfully refuses from mine."

Dropping her hand quietly, the speaker turned on his heel.

In an instant Ivor Clay had placed himself in front of Sithrington as he moved towards the door. A red stain of colour lay across Clay's forehead though the lower part of his face and his lips were perfectly white.

"Stop," he cried quickly, dropping every vestige of the studied formality of his manner and bearing. He set his teeth hardly and paused. "I ask your pardon," he said, frankly. He held out his hand with a quick gesture that would have recalled to Henry Tilson the days of his boyhood. "Shake hands!" he exclaimed, his voice dropping.

Lord Sithrington retreated, his face hardening. He clasped his hands behind him. "The favour," he said, icily, "is no longer mine to give, sir. I wish you good-morning."

Ivor Clay's outstretched hand fell to his side. He drew back instantly, with a face every whit as cold and rigid as the other man's.

Like a flash of lightning Susan was between them. With each of her hands she clasped a hand of either man in hers.

"George," she said, drawing their hands together firmly with her own so that they touched unavoidably, "be generous. Ivor "—unknowingly her voice softened over his name—"for my sake, remember"—her voice sank lower—"he has been very good to us, and we—I—don't deserve it."

There was a moment of silence.

"Good-bye," said Sithrington at last, and Ivor Clay echoed the word, his voice shaking a little. He steadied it and added firmly, "I wronged you, I am sorry."

Sithrington left the room without another word.

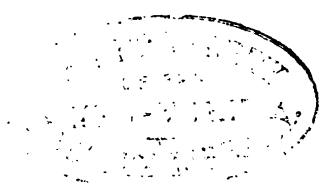
Ivor Clay took Susan's two hands in his and laid them against his breast.

"Susan," he said, and his voice was hoarse, "I would not have taken *anything* at his hands but you, my beloved."

"Yes, you would," she murmured softly, as he drew her closer into his arms, "because you loved truly, both of you, and 'Love is the test—the true touchstone.'"

In the garden of a certain Twickenham Villa about three weeks later, an old lawyer was pacing up and down between his beds of golden crocuses and lily-white snowdrops. In his hand was the daily paper, and more than once he glanced at a paragraph in it headed: NEW BRITAIN. RESIGNATION OF HIS EXCELLENCY THE EARL OF SITHRINGTON.

"Ivor," mused Henry Tilson, and he smiled and forgot the crocuses, "wins—all along the line."

But no; Ivor Clay would have acknowledged now, that perfect victory is never given to mortal man.

THE END.